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ABSTRACT

This guide has two main objectives: (1) to help school board members become better governors of the local educational enterprise; and (2) to help school board members respond to questions from the public about the National Commission on Excellence in Education report entitled "A Nation at Risk." To meet these objectives, the guide offers a process model through which board members can more effectively approach education by establishing the policy framework in which it can thrive and the procedural base for evaluating it on a continuing basis. The model takes into account the setting of goals, curriculum development, standards and expectations, teaching, time, leadership, fiscal support, involving the community, implementing the process, and measuring outcomes. The role of the Federal government in quality education is also discussed. The guide ends with a list of questions to be used by board members as a way of assessing how much they know about their school district and in which areas they need more information. Where applicable, a feature entitled "Comparatively Speaking" outlines the National Commission's findings as they might apply to local communities, as well as the findings of other studies. (CMG)

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A Blueprint for Educational Excellence

A School Board Member's Guide

NSBA

...SERVING AMERICAN EDUCATION THROUGH SCHOOL BOARD LEADERSHIP

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A Blueprint for Educational Excellence

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January 1984

Foreword

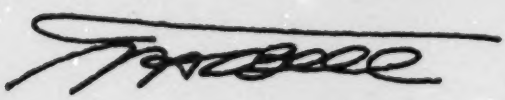
Since I assumed the position of U.S. Secretary of Education, I have often called upon school board members to more rigorously respond to the challenges facing our nation's public schools. Recent national studies and reports on public education have clearly indicated that we are not adequately preparing our children to meet the opportunities and technical demands of the emerging information age. If our students are not prepared to read, to write, to calculate, to think, to reason, and to use computers and other technological tools of this new age at a high level of competency, then our position as a strong nation of free people is truly at risk.

With all risks, however, come opportunities. As this guide suggests, school board members who show true leadership have a significant opportunity to involve students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other community leaders in a renewed commitment to quality education and excellence.

I encourage you to capitalize on this opportunity. I remain convinced that school boards can make a difference if they will focus their attention on academic policy and make certain that our schools, whatever other roles they may fill, are first and foremost places of learning.

The historic contract between our nation and its public schools has been a great one. Public education, administered under thoughtful policies developed by local school board members, has continually contributed to the quality of life in a sound and productive America. Any slippage in recent years can and must be remedied.

The U.S. Department of Education does not intend to default on this historic compact. Rather, through support for projects such as this guide, we hope to see it renewed and strengthened by challenging all concerned with public education to provide vigorous and unflinching leadership at the local level.



T.H. Bell
The Secretary
United States Department of Education

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Introduction

"It is our conviction that the essential raw materials needed to reform our educational system are waiting to be mobilized through effective leadership...."

—National Commission on Excellence in Education

The local school board cannot presume to accept the total responsibility for solving the real—and in some cases, perceived—problems of the American educational system. There can be no question, however, that local school boards have a fundamental and key role to play in determining the quality of American education.

It is the local school board that has the most influence and control over a community's educational program. Through its policy process, the school board defines both the quality and quantity of the community's educational commitment. The board's policies prescribe what is desired in education, why it is desirable, and how much is desired from the educational system. Through clear and effective policies, coupled with thoughtful and effective management of school resources—both fiscal and human—a board can make a real difference in the educational program.

It is important to remember, too, that the school board is the governing body that acts closest to home. Because it is the political entity that is most accountable to the community it serves, it is the best interpreter of the community's educational needs. The local school board truly is the designated leader in our form of representative government when it comes to providing excellence in the nation's public schools.

A New Call for Effective Leadership

Perhaps more than at any other time in our nation's history, the policy-making role of school board members has come under sharp national scrutiny—which is one result of the call for effective school leadership by the National Commission on Excellence in Education and a host of other study groups. Whether the recommendations of these studies and reports have focused on curriculum needs, educational environments, or teaching concerns, all have focused on dimensions of public education that originate with the local school board and its policies.

More widely circulated and accounted for in the public press, the National Commission's report, *A Nation at Risk*, clearly has challenged school board members to draw broadly upon community resources in defining excellence and to undertake a continuing effort to improve the public schools and the quality of the education they dispense. It called upon the local school board, as well as all elements of the educational community, to make a "new beginning" and to revitalize our commitment to education in American public schools.

Part of this "new beginning" is the suggestion of the Commission's report, and others like it, that conventional thinking about education must change in the face of our present technological revolution. For the school board member, this means the school board must vigorously assert its legitimate policy-making authority, develop clear lines of authority and accountability to ensure that policy is being implemented properly, and formulate procedures to review and revise policy on a regular basis to ensure its integrity in changing times and conditions.

How This Guide Can Help

A main goal of this guide is to help school board members become better governors of the local educational enterprise. To meet this objective, this work offers a process that will help board members more effectively approach education by establishing the policy framework in which it can thrive—and the procedural base for evaluating it on a continuing basis. Through the process, a board will be able to define excellence in education as the community the board serves sees it.

In helping a board to define quality education at the local level and to govern education efficiently, this guide also helps the board respond to the public's questions about education and to the pressure to improve it brought about by the *Nation at Risk* report and other similar reports. Because of the intense national attention the Commission's report has received, helping board members respond to it is another main objective of this guide.

It is not a goal of this work to present a composite of all the best research on excellence in education. (The National School Boards Association has reviewed this literature in a *Leadership Report*, titled "Excellent Schools: How Boards Can Make a Difference," published in the fall of 1983.) In addition, many state school boards associations have taken a lead in these efforts at the state level.

School board members should remember, though, that the Commission's report is just one of many serious recent efforts to address the quality of public education. A board member who is guided only by what the Commission has recommended would be misguided. As a board member, you would want to understand how the Commission's report relates to and compares with some of the other studies. You would be wise to evaluate the Commission's findings and recommendations in light of other studies and recommendations, *and with special regard to what is desired by your community.*

To assist you in evaluating the Commission's report, this guide does two things:

- It occasionally reminds you to question the Commission's findings.

- Under the heading "Comparatively Speaking," it outlines the findings as they might apply to your local community; and of other studies to provide a broader context in which to view the Commission's findings and recommendations.

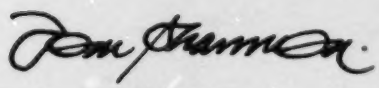
In addition to helping a board respond to the Commission's report in a productive manner, and to viewing education as an enterprise to be efficiently managed, this guide also seeks to:

- Start board members thinking about excellence in education as a continuing, long-term investment in the future of our nation.
- Confirm the board's roles and responsibilities for providing the educational framework for a school district.
- Stress the importance of declaring local expectations through the setting of specific, written educational goals and objectives.
- Establish policy development and implementation as the key tools for meeting local expectations for excellence.
- Provide a process through which a board can represent all segments of the community in the public schools.

Finally, we unabashedly admit that this guide focuses on the singular viewpoint of the local school board member, as it guides you through the maze of contemporary studies on the quality of education undertaken by educational groups and others, and through some of the current research on what makes schools effective. It is a *guide*, rather than a research treatise. Instead of giving you all the answers to what works in other school systems, it helps you in asking the right questions of the right people so that you discover what is relevant to your schools. The process presented in this handbook will assist you in designing a local response to the Commission's report. By following the process, you will develop a local definition of what constitutes excellence in your schools, and you will bring together all of the elements that are necessary to meet your defined educational goals, including public and staff understanding and support, and financial support.

This guide was developed with the support of a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. If, by reading it, you are better equipped to discuss, adopt, and oversee the implementation of policies that lead to educational excellence as your community defines it, the main goal of Education Secretary T.H. Bell, the Department, NSBA, and state school boards associations will have been met.

Very truly yours,



Thomas A. Shannon
Executive Director
National School Boards Association
Washington, D.C.

I
A Process Approach for Assessing Excellence in Education

"We define excellence to mean several related things. At the level of the individual learner, it means performing on the boundary of individual ability in ways that push back personal limits, in school and in the workplace. Excellence characterizes a school or college that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries in every way possible to help students reach them...."

—National Commission on Excellence in Education

The report of the presidentially appointed National Commission on Excellence in Education has already enjoyed wide distribution and comment. School boards in communities throughout the nation have begun the predictable process of seeking to interpret the report at the local level.

Already, some boards have found themselves confronting the Commission's programmatic recommendations as a working definition for excellence. In the Arlington County (Va.) Public Schools, for example, the response has been quick in coming: *The Washington Post* reported, "The National Commission's recommendations, and the staff suggestions based on them, promise to be the yardstick by which Arlington educators are going to assess their own programs this year."

Why A Process Approach To Assessing Excellence?

The application of the Commission's recommendations may well bring Arlington schools to excellence, but most school leaders agree that what works for one district may fail in another. To assess excellence and to give it relevance locally, board members need to assess local needs, the state of local finances, and the community's standards for education.

This is a view clearly articulated from the view of school board members by Thomas A. Shannon, Executive Director of the National School Boards Association. Suggesting that board members remain proac-

tive in responding to the report, Shannon notes: "To be sure, we all have a visceral feeling that, indeed, more time on instructional tasks by students will yield positive results, that enhancing the school district 'reward system' for teachers will attract and keep superior persons, and so forth."

On the larger question of what constitutes excellence, Shannon suggests, "Nobody can answer the larger question for American public schools because, unlike Europe and Asia, we do not have a nationalized school system. We do not have 'an American public school system.' What we have are more than 15,000 local school districts governed by school boards mostly elected in the home community and operating under various state laws."

The local responsibility of school board members, Shannon concludes, is to translate local public concern for the quality of education into actions that address specifically, those local concerns. "Thus," he says, "the actual job of translating any recommendation to modify curriculum in the public schools ultimately falls to local school boards."

In making these assessments and in developing a local definition of what constitutes quality education, board members cannot rely on informal communication. They must abide by a process that will allow the broadest possible discourse between the board and school administrators, teachers, students, business people, parents and other taxpayers, and other government officials. Through the process, they must be able to examine the major facets and many implications of the Commission's report and how these relate to their school system and to community expectations. They must be able to reach a local consensus on the answers to questions such as these:

- Are we really "at risk" in education, as the Commission reported?
- Should we adopt all or even parts of the Commission's recommendations?
- What additional research and recommendations are important to consider?
- What does the community expect from the schools?
- How much do we want to do, how much can we afford to do, and what are the differences between the two?

By completing a structured assessment of community standards and expectations, and by building a consensus, the school board forges a coalition that works to assure that all segments of the community will support the schools.

Support And Commitment Needed

Even a cursory look at the spate of recent studies on effective education reveals just how critical this support will be if schools are to improve areas that have been deemed lacking by researchers and others. These areas include the quality of the school curriculum, the educational environment, teacher proficiency, and textbooks and other teaching materials—including technology. Improvements in these areas will come only with increased spending and commitment to educational priorities. Mustering support for these new commitments will require increased involvement of all segments of the school community in the design of educational programs.

A Process That Works

From the board member's perspective (and often experience), the similarities between managing business and educational tasks are unavoidable. A successful school board functions much like its counterpart in the private sector.

Look, for example, at what management expert Peter Drucker says are a business board's three major functions:

- *Service as an organ of review.* Acting as a board, persons of diverse experience counsel, advise, oversee, and deliberate and work with top management.
- *Service as the guarantor of performance.* The enterprise requires an effective and functioning body that can direct performance and that can remove nonperforming managers.
- *Service as the "connector" to the public.* The board relates to the public, talks to the public, and recognizes the importance of public and community relations to the success of the enterprise.

Elements of each of these three essential functions are common to all school boards. Like business boards, school boards are ultimately responsible for the design and execution of a product. Furthermore, the success or failure of that product depends wholly upon the judgements of the customers it is intended to serve.

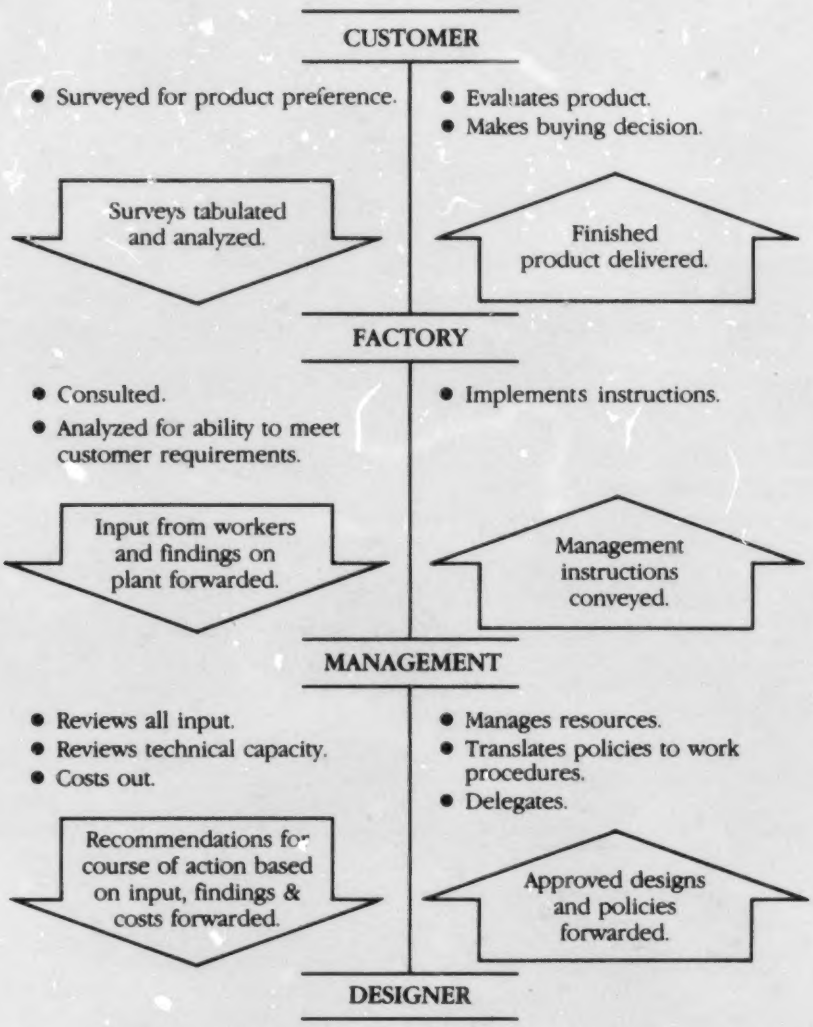
What kind of process, then, will enable a board to make the necessary local assessments and to win community support? Simply: It is a process that treats education the same way a business regards a "sellable" product. It is one that recognizes the "community" aspect of designing and offering a product in which each segment of the product audience has some sense of "authorship" of the final product.

Take, for example, the process that would most likely succeed if the product were, say, automobiles. As diagrammed below, this process would enable:

- The customer to express his views on what kind of product design meets his standards.
- The factory employees to add their views and make a sensible assessment of the current plant's ability to meet customer expectations.
- Management to analyze costs and other key factors and to convey its recommendations in consultation with the product's designers.
- The designers to respond with a product that balances the needs, wants, and capabilities of each input group.

Then—as design is implemented back through the process to the consumer—all factory managers and employees are working toward a common design they helped to create. The customer, in the end, responds to a product he has had a say about.

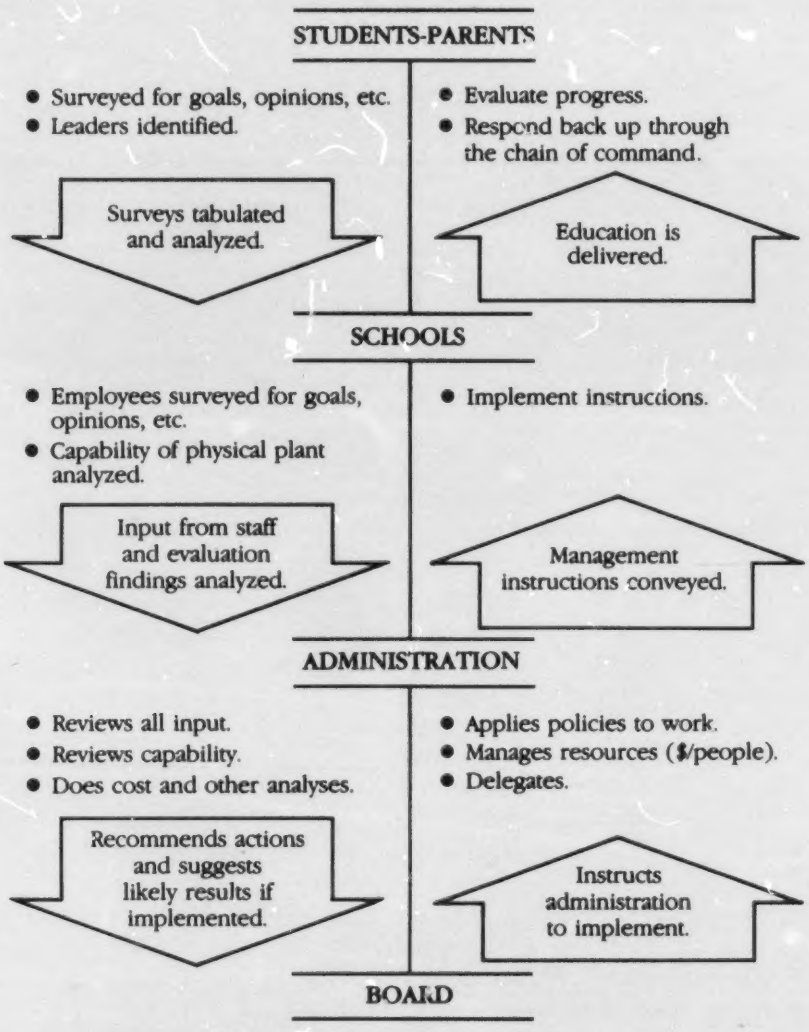
This same process can be applied to "manufacturing" quality education. Whether the school board uses the Commission's or any or all of the other current research reports as the basis for assessing the local educational program, it can and should involve all aspects of the community in its design process.



Of course, schools are not factories; teachers are professionals; and school administrators and board members are both managers and designers. So, it is necessary to do some quick "translating" of the manufacturing process by exchanging:

- Parents and students for the customer.
- The schools and their employees for the factory.
- The school administration as the first line of management.
- The school board for the ultimate designer.

Now, the process model looks like this:


STUDENTS-PARENTS
• Surveyed for goals, opinions, etc.
• Leaders identified.
Surveys tabulated and analyzed.
• Evaluate progress.
• Respond back up through the chain of command.
Education is delivered.
SCHOOLS
• Employees surveyed for goals, opinions, etc.
• Capability of physical plant analyzed.
Input from staff and evaluation findings analyzed.
• Implement instructions.
Management instructions conveyed.
ADMINISTRATION
• Reviews all input.
• Reviews capability.
• Does cost and other analyses.
Recommends actions and suggests likely results if implemented.
• Applies policies to work.
• Manages resources ($/people).
• Delegates.
Instructs administration to implement.
BOARD
• Reviews recommendations.
• Consults with Superintendent.
• Assesses, sets goals, policies.
• Allocates resources.

It is important for the board member to understand that every participant in the educational process has clear responsibilities for what happens in the schools.

As depicted by the accompanying chart, the school board has the essential responsibility, through its policy process, for setting overall goals and objectives for the schools and for review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the schools.

The purpose of using a process approach to meeting these critical board responsibilities is to recognize that administrators, professional staff members, parents and students are also key "actors" in the educational process.

Beginning with Section 3 of this guide, we will return to this process model and its relationship to excellence in education. First, however, we will explore how, in the current state of the art in education, the board's policy-making relates to excellence as it is defined by student performance.

A Simplified Model of Responsibility

The School Board:

- Represents community.
- Oversees facilities and financial planning.
- Sets goals and objectives.
- Establishes policies.
- Reviews performance.
- Directs administration.
- Evaluates the superintendent.

The Superintendent and Administration:

- Maintain public liaison.
- Prepare facility and financial plans.
- Implement policies.
- Administer school programs.
- Recommend personnel to be hired and evaluate personnel.
- Measure performance.
- Are directed by and report to the school board.

The Teacher:

- Maintains student and parent liaison.
- Manages the classroom.
- Plans student objectives.
- Implements teaching strategies.
- Monitors and reports student performance.

The Student:

- Takes responsibility for his own learning.
- Attends school regularly.
- Completes homework assignment, and does more than just "get by."
- Communicates with parents, teachers, counselors, and others.
- Is self-disciplined and does not disrupt the learning environment.
- Seeks to develop higher-order skills, and tries to relate his school experience to the work world, among other things.
- Seeks to develop a sense of values and a global view of the world.

II
Seeking Excellence Through School Board Policies

In the current "state of the art" in education, excellence is being defined by how well students are able to perform. School boards are being called upon to develop policies that are specific enough to relate directly to measurable learning outcomes.

Many of the nation's school districts have already begun assessing the relationships between policies, the manner in which they are interpreted and implemented, and the results they produce. Much of this activity is grounded in recent research into effective schools.

What We Know About Effective Schools

The effective schools concept has gained momentum by revitalizing hopes that what happens at the school-building level can be primal to the efficiency of the education process. It has at its axis three central and interrelated assumptions:

- That schools which are uniquely effective can be identified. Efforts to upgrade the teaching in schools with high concentrations of poor and minority students have documented this fact.
- That these effective schools exhibit definitive characteristics that can be controlled and influenced at the classroom level.
- That these characteristics can be captured and adapted for use in schools characterized as "ineffective."

The underlying strength in the effective schools concept is that its proponents and researchers have extended into new frontiers by attempting to locate specific, quantifiable, and measurable factors of school organization and culture which can be manipulated by school principals and staff.

Early Findings Are Promising

The early findings of effective schools research are indeed promising. They indicate that students learn better when schools exhibit certain characteristics. Among them:

- A positive school climate that is conducive to learning and free of disciplinary problems.

- High expectations for student learning and achievement.
- A school-wide emphasis on the teaching of key basic skills.
- A clearly defined set of educational objectives.
- Strong leadership from a principal who sets high standards for achievement, who regularly observes classroom activities, and who provides incentives for quality instruction.

Unfortunately, effective schools research is not unlike a "silver lining" that has an accompanying cloud. Effective schools researchers concede that a good deal of "homework" remains to be done before the findings of this research can be declared to lead to excellence in the classroom. Some of the important questions to ask about this research and some of the preliminary answers include the following:

Q: Will this approach produce excellence that meets the broad definition of the Commission?

A: In some respects, yes. The current research focus is too narrow, though, to define excellence in its social context, which is a Commission goal.

Q: Is a narrow focus a problem?

A: Not necessarily, but some experts question whether early efforts to rate learning outcomes in effective schools failed to take into account environmental factors that might have a bearing on those outcomes.

Q: What does this approach measure?

A: It measures learning outcomes, but does not assess the philosophies or values students are developing.

Q: Aren't learning outcomes most important?

A: Perhaps, but the jury is still out. Some experts are concerned that measuring success solely by skills mastery will reveal little about how in-school factors affect the process of teaching.

Implications For Board Policy-Making

Do these and other questions about the depth and quality of early effective schools research mean, then, that a school board should await a final verdict before committing study, time, or resources to policies that might reflect these new approaches to educational quality?

Of course not.

This research, like the recommendations in the Commission's report, should provoke discussion and help foster some assessment of the community's goals for education. It should be used by board members and administrators as they rethink educational policies. It should not be used, however, as a single resource or tool for "manufacturing" excellence in the schools.

Significant change in approaches to education usually takes years to fully implement. A board's efforts to produce excellence through policy development will succeed in time only if they are tied to continuous efforts to:

- Set high goals and standards consistent with community expectations.
- Ensure that workable action plans are developed to meet educational objectives.

- Monitor measurable results.
- Evaluate learning outcome approaches.
- A board's policy development process also must be flexible so that it preserves the board's ability to amend policies as necessary. This flexibility creates an opportunity for the board to allow effective schools models to play a key role in the early development of policies, yet preserves the option of considering other approaches that additional research and "homework" might add to the mix of policy options.

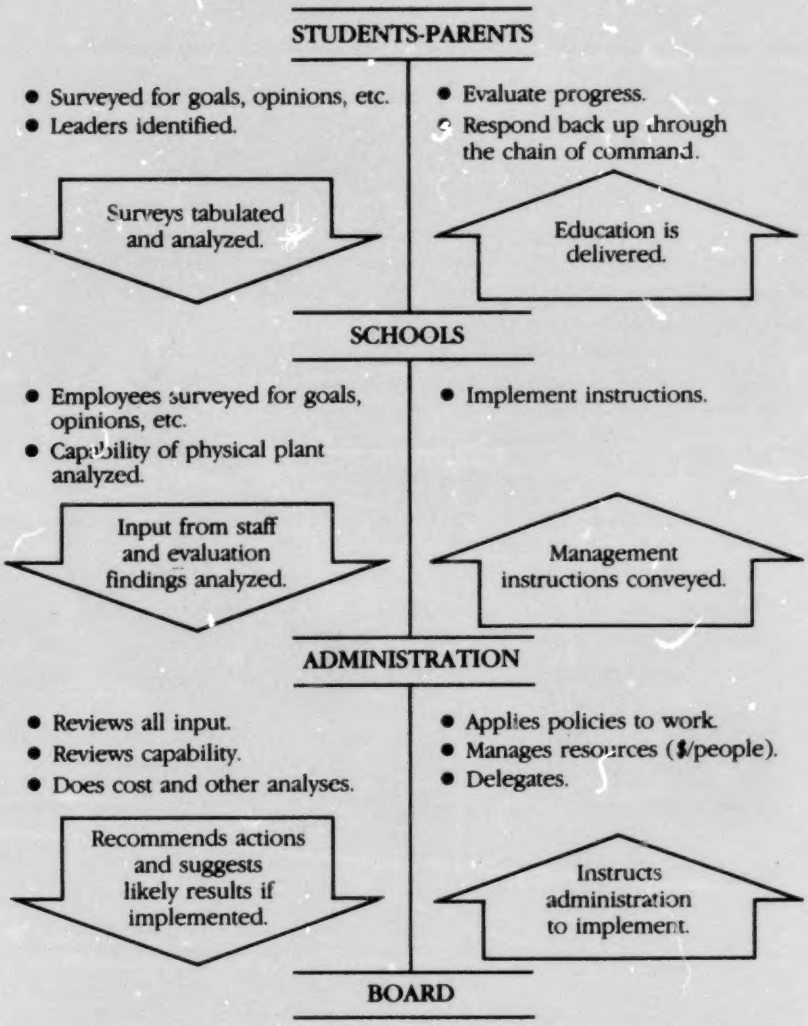
Some Key Considerations in Setting Policies That Seek Measurement of Learning Outcomes

If not yet perfect, research into effective schools indicates that student performance can be influenced and measured through programs committed to accomplishing specific learning outcomes at the building level.

If board policies are to be judged in relation to their impact on student achievement, they must be influenced by factors crucial to achievement, such as these:

- **School-level goals and objectives need to be in concert with a district-wide educational philosophy. The board's policies should be aligned to delineate specific expectations for student learning.**
- **Instructional grouping policies should be utilized to promote higher expectations for student learning.**
- **A concerted effort must be made to develop a climate that minimizes instructional interruptions.**
- **An orderly school climate will be dependent upon school discipline codes and practices that are developed and enforced in cooperation with the students, and that stress the value of learning.**
- **Provisions must be made for frequent evaluation and reporting of pupil progress.**
- **There must be a high level of promotion of policies that communicate high standards for student achievement of school goals.**

III
Before Square One Comes Setting Goals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Management instructions conveyed.
ADMINISTRATION
• Reviews all input.
• Reviews capability.
• Does cost and other analyses.
• Applies policies to work.
• Manages resources ($/people).
• Delegates.
Recommends actions and suggests likely results if implemented.
Instructs administration to implement.
BOARD
• Reviews recommendations.
• Consults with Superintendent.
• Assesses, sets goals, policies.
• Allocates resources.

It takes no more than a quick look at the manufacturing process "translated" into school district functions to discover that, before school boards can enter into an assessment of excellence, a basis for the assessment must exist.

Before any board member can answer the question, "How are we doing?," he or she must have a firm grasp on the answer to a more primary question: "What do we want to do?"

Does excellence in the district equate to rising test scores, or to improving the public image of the schools, or to implementing remedial and accelerated classes, or even to closing an antiquated, but neighborhood, campus without a public outcry?

To answer these (and a myriad of other) questions before proceeding to square one in the assessment process, the board should devote considerable effort to assessing, projecting, and planning for the implementation of its goals.

Most boards begin goal setting with an assessment of needs, which is usually reliant on surveys. This assessment helps board members:

- Examine routine school operations.
- Prioritize needs.
- Evaluate the district's current philosophy on education.
- Identify future demographics and other facts about the school population and community that will influence board decision-making.
- Evaluate means for involving the community in the development of policies and action plans which have an impact on the schools.
- Demonstrate the board's commitment to continuous evaluation and improvement of the schools.
- Collect critical information on finances.

Why Set Goals?

Well-defined goals are the steps to providing leadership. As pointed out in the NSBA publication, *Becoming a Better Board Member*, well-defined goals are the basis for:

- **Good policy-making.**
- **Setting priorities.**
- **The planning of programs.**
- **Periodic evaluation.**
- **Effective communication and cooperation among board members, administrators, teachers, students, and patrons.**
- **Accountability.**

Where To Get Help

Two of the major problems some boards experience in structuring a proper and thoughtful needs assessment are finding the time and people with the skill to develop an assessment that focuses on both objective data and subjective variables.

The good news is that help for this kind of project is never far away. Numerous needs assessment instruments have been developed and are available through sources such as:

- State school boards associations.
- State education departments.
- Schools with public school administration programs.
- Professional education consultants.

In addition, NSBA and the American Association of School Administrators included an assessment instrument in their joint publication, *Self-Evaluation of School Boards*. NSBA and a number of state school boards associations also sponsor an Educational Goals Survey service to assist school districts in identifying what the community thinks students should learn, what it thinks the schools should teach, and where the community thinks its resources should be allocated.

A few words of caution. Whether board members design an assessment tool from scratch or use one of the formal instruments already in circulation, they will find the key to successful goals assessment is total involvement by all who will be affected by the results of the goal-setting process. In that regard, the "manufacturing" process in this work is certainly applicable to the goal-setting effort.

. . . *And the "payoff."* Involving all elements of the community, including the school and administrative staffs, may not prove to be a panacea for school boards. Some surprises, unpleasantness, or unpopular decisions are likely to occur at some stage of the process of seeking to define excellence at the local level.

If unanticipated problems do occur, goals can provide instant direction for resolving them. When properly and thoughtfully formulated through discussions involving the board, staff, and the community, goals always will provide the framework for further evaluation, necessary adjustments, and school improvement.

How To Involve The School Community

Some boards organize task forces or advisory committees to get the kind of information they need to make an informed analysis about the district's educational programs.

These task forces or committees often consist of representatives from each of the major school constituencies, including the various levels of school staff, parent-teacher groups, and the business community. They serve the board by studying school programs and problems, and by giving their recommendations and opinions on the direction the schools should take in any given area. They can help a board in its needs assessment and goal-setting efforts, as well as assist the board in making the kinds of decisions that must be made throughout the assessment process that must be undertaken to define excellence in education.

Surveys: A Necessary Tool

Although some boards believe task forces or advisory committees give them adequate input from the various constituencies, it is recommended that the board allocate the necessary resources to complete comprehensive surveying of each facet of the school community. Such surveys are part and parcel to a district's needs assessment efforts.

The surveying can be done at each step of the educational "manufacturing" process (that is, first survey parents, then teachers, and so on), or through one well-designed survey that provides data on which the board can base both its goal-setting and its policy development activities.

It is further recommended that board members recognize surveying as a "special science" and turn to professionals in the field for the design of this essential tool. But since the cost of surveying can be formidable, some boards may need to design a "do-it-yourself" survey. In this case, the board should use advisory committees, its superintendent, other administrators, teachers and, perhaps, a paid consultant with grounding in the techniques of surveying to help develop the instrument.

Whether the board opts for a professionally designed survey or a self-developed one, there are several basic fundamentals to grasp in order to gain the most from the time, money, and effort the district will expend in its surveying:

- The board should have a firm fix on the purpose of the survey. In lay terms, the key question is, "What do we wish to discover?"
- Since excellence is a district-wide concern, the sample selected for surveying must be representative of the widest possible audience.
- Still, the size of the sample does not necessarily need to be directly proportionate, on a group-by-group basis, with the size of the district.

KEY TIP

Parameters for selecting valid samples and tabular calculations of the probable error rates for various sizes of samples can be found by consulting a text on surveying techniques.

- The board should know, in advance, what it intends to do with the results of its survey, and how survey results will be compiled and tabulated.
- The board also should decide which surveying methods will be employed (interviews, written questionnaires, telephoning, etc.).
- The board will need to set a time line for the duration of the survey, dates for any "checkpoint" reviews, and the dates on which elements or the results of the survey will be publicized.

In addition to these basics, the board should ensure that its survey does not contain questions that are ambiguous, unclear, too long, or otherwise structured in a manner that will preclude the board from eliciting the specific information required for its assessments.

Improperly structured questions might typically be phrased, "Don't you think . . ." (*leading*); or, "Do you or don't you . . ." (double option).

KEY TIP
Pretest survey questions on a small group to identify areas where misunderstandings or ambiguity might exist.

What Should the Board's Survey(s) Include?

In subsequent sections of this publication, the specific recommendations of the Commission's report will be covered in greater detail. Board members should be aware, though, of the five "critical" areas of educational improvement the Commission identified in its report. This awareness should help the board to set some parameters for, "What do we wish to discover?" Board members must also take note of the fact that although a number of recommendations were made, the cost factors for their implementation were not discussed.

Nevertheless, we note that the Commission recommended:

- Improvements in content (curriculum).
- Higher standards and expectations.
- Increased instructional time.
- Higher standards and better rewards for teachers.
- More educational support in terms of leadership and finances.

The Commission's report was introduced to board members from across the country on April 26, 1983, the final day of the 1983 convention of the National School Boards Association. Commission member Robert V. Haderlein, then immediate past president of NSBA, told the convention's delegate assembly to read the report and "simmer down. Then, read it again, and use it by applying it to your own school districts."

NSBA delegates subsequently approved several resolutions that might be helpful in focusing on areas to be addressed in a surveying effort:

- On *high school requirements*, the delegates called for a review of local requirements and curriculum in English, mathematics, science, social studies, computer sciences, and foreign language. The assembly also recommended strengthening courses in career and vocational education.
- A "*time on task*" resolution urged boards to review the length of the school day and year, and to review the use of time spent on instruction. But the delegates stopped short of the Commission's recommendation to lengthen school days and the academic year. They suggested that boards seek "practical ways to add instructional time."
- The NSBA delegates also urged that *teacher certification programs* be examined. Boards, they said, should consider using nonschool experts to offset shortages of qualified teachers in math and science; examine possible career ladders for teachers; seek teacher salaries that are

"competitive, market-sensitive, and performance-based"; consider lengthening the teacher work year; and use experienced, qualified teachers in the design of inservice training and for the supervision of probationary teachers.

- Another resolution encouraged boards and state school boards associations to increase *public relations efforts* to build broad public support for providing the resources necessary for the public schools to do their part in producing the "learning society" called for by the Commission.

A Note of Caution

NSBA Executive Director Thomas A. Shannon, in assessing both the Commission's and the NSBA Delegates' views, points out that neither set of recommendations will automatically cause "something to happen with those recommendations in the local schools where education takes place."

Shannon recommends that board members undertake processes which assess local opinion, "Or in other words," he says, "whatever works best in your home community."

Shannon suggests that "the credibility of the Commission's report rests entirely with its accuracy in diagnosing the problem and prescribing a cure. And that's where board members 'enter stage right' . . . It's because you might have such a problem (as identified by the Commission's report) that the NSBA Delegate Assembly in San Francisco voted overwhelmingly to recommend that local school boards study the issues raised in the report."

NSBA's Executive Director concludes that the delegates' "prescription" for excellence was to "encourage careful evaluation of the instructional program by the school board in each community, in light of the recommendations of the Commission, implement changes that appear desirable and feasible as a result of the local evaluation, and strive to obtain public and legislative support to effect locally agreed upon changes in the instructional program."

IV
Curriculum Development: The Very "Stuff" of Education

"Our high standards of literacy and educational diversity have been slipping. Well-intentioned but misguided policy-makers have stamped uniform mediocrity on the rich variety and excellence that has been our heritage."

—Ronald Reagan, President of the United States

On April 30, 1983, President Ronald Reagan sent a message on education to the nation over the Mutual, Westinghouse, NBC, and RKO radio networks.

"We're a people who believe that each generation will stand upon the shoulders of the one before it, the accomplishments of each ever greater than the last," the President said. "Our families immigrated here to make a better life, not just for themselves, but for their children and their children's children. Education was not simply a part of American society. It was the key that opened the golden door."

Today, the President charged, "Our education system, once the finest in the world, is in a sorry state of disrepair." Then, linking education to the future, the President called upon Americans to "move education forward again with common sense as our guide."

Mr. Reagan suggested that the agenda for the future of education in America can be cast in clear terms:

"The National Commission of Excellence in Education recommends requiring four years of English in high school and three solid years each of math and science. It suggests more and longer school days, higher goals, and tougher standards for matriculation. Our teachers should be better trained and better paid. And, we must no longer make excuses for those who are not qualified to teach."

Curriculum As The "Right Stuff"

Although the President's and the Commission's agenda for education seem perfectly clear, how those agenda items are to be interpreted at the local level is not.

It is one thing to suggest teaching four years of English, and another to determine whether those four years will encompass literature or

phonics, or elementary writing or senior composition, or the classics or contemporary poetry. It is one thing to recommend the teaching of three years each of math and science, and another to decide whether those subjects will be algebra or geometry or trigonometry or calculus, and biology or geology or psychology or sociology or chemistry or applied physics.

Determining exactly what the curriculum should be is where local school boards—and board policies on curriculum, local administrators, staffs, and publics must play a key role. While the Commission defined its "New Basics" in the broadest of terms (four years of English, three years of math, three years of science, three years of social studies, and six months of computer science), the President clearly stated where the responsibility for giving substance to these subjects lies: He called upon parents to demand these and other reforms in their local schools, and to hold their local officials accountable.

Judging by the earliest reactions to the Commission's report, there can be no question that school boards already are responding to the President's plea. Nor is there much doubt that the new calls for educational

Comparatively Speaking

In focusing on the specific recommendations of the Commission's report, board members should be aware of the similarities and differences suggested by other contemporary studies of public education in America. Here is a quick look at the conclusions of several serious studies on the quality of the public school curriculum:

- **In *Educating Americans for the 21st Century*, the National Science Board Commission on Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science, and Technology suggested we must return to basics, but that the basics of the 21st century are more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. The Board suggested revision of elementary school schedules to include sustained attention to math, science, and technology. It also suggested that high schools demand at least three years of math, science, and technology, including at least one year of algebra and a semester of computer science courses. The Board also emphasized incorporating computers and other technologies in the teaching of math and science and other appropriate subjects.**
- **In *Action for Excellence*, the Education Commission of the States' (ECS) Task Force on Education for Economic Growth made a general call for strengthening the public school curriculum not only in math and science, but in all disciplines. It also suggested that academic programs be enriched by eliminating "soft," nonessential courses in order to encourage mastery of beyond-basics skills, such as problem-solving, analysis, interpretation, and persuasive writing.**
- **In *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching suggested that a core curriculum be developed to constitute two-thirds of the required units for graduation from high school. It called for a "single track" core for the first two years of high school bolstered by "elective clusters" the final two years, and by career guidance.**

excellence will require boards to reexamine continuously policies on the curriculum, which the Commission deemed to be "the very stuff of education."

The Commission also likened the "stuff" being taught in American schools today to a cafeteria line in which the appetizers and desserts can be mistaken for the main courses. Consequently, boards undertaking an assessment of the curriculum certainly should seek a community-based definition of the "basics" in terms of what basic skills students must master to effectively function in the world today.

Boards also must be prepared to link this definition to standards and expectations (*covered in the next section of this book*). As the Commission noted, the weighting of the curriculum should reflect its relevancy to the desired outcomes of teaching. "In some schools," the Commission lamented, "the time spent learning to cook and drive counts as much toward a high school diploma as the time spent studying mathematics, English, chemistry, U.S. history, or biology."

Comparatively Speaking

John I. Goodlad, the dean of the School of Education at the University of California at Los Angeles, comprehensively surveyed teachers, students, and parents from 25 schools and discovered two points of significance to curriculum:

- **"Approximately 80 percent of parents sampled said they were satisfied with the curriculum their schools were providing for their children. Fewer parents were satisfied with what was offered in foreign languages. The percentage of parents who indicated satisfaction with the four major academic areas decreased from the elementary level through junior high and to high school. These data indicate a higher degree of satisfaction with the nation's public schools than that which had been presented in much of the current literature on effective schooling."**
- **"Approximately 95 percent of the parents surveyed indicated that they do not advise or help make decisions about what textbooks or learning materials are used. Nearly 50 percent, though, indicated that they would like to. Whether they should is another question, one that should be clarified in light of today's emphasis on parent participation."**

Curriculum As The Top Priority

The board should start any assessment of excellence with the presumption that curriculum is the most important of all school programs. Curriculum is what ultimately determines the quality of the end product of education. It is the one program that most closely touches every student, parent, teacher, administrator, and school board member. Curriculum is also the one program that determines the schools' contribution to society at the local, national, and global level.

Because of the curriculum's impact, a wise board will give serious thought to the Commission's call for a curriculum which recognizes that "the variety of student aspirations, abilities, and preparation requires that appropriate content be available to satisfy diverse needs." These words address the need for responsiveness and flexibility. School boards should also be cognizant of other educational reform reports such as the ECS Task Force report which is receiving a great deal of support from many state governors. Brief comparative synthesis are presented throughout this guide. They also suggest that a board must be prepared, when necessary, to challenge traditional approaches to curriculum and to the established uniform educational programs that some experts believe have become impediments to effective schooling.

For example, a board must assess whether the use of curriculum guides that, in the words of one researcher, "dictate that we get through the Civil War by Christmas" fly in the face of valid research indicating that students learn at different paces and often at paces directly tied to their interest in a particular subject.

The effort to develop an effective, relevant curriculum must recognize also, as the Commission notes, "a common expectation: We must demand the best effort and performance from all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged, whether destined for college, the farm, or industry."

That is a tall order for any board. Yet, if excellence is indeed the goal, board members must accept this as the first marching order in the war against mediocrity.

If school boards have indeed been parties to what the Commission boldly termed "unilateral educational disarmament," then the call for excellence is an opportunity to rethink educational policies—starting with the pivotal curriculum policies. Many school leaders believe today that this effort can—and should—reflect a commitment to rearm and refinance education equal to our present commitment to restore our nation's defenses.

Barriers To Affecting The Curriculum

Although curriculum content is the most important concern of board members, it traditionally has been the major source of frustration for them. As pointed out in 1979 by an NSBA task force of board members and administrators, boards face several significant barriers to developing effective curriculum policies. Boards, the task force concluded, can lose their control over or interest in curriculum development because of both physical and mental barriers.

Among *physical barriers* to effective curriculum policy-making are:

- State and federal mandates or judicial orders that predetermine elements of curriculum content.
- Lack of finances through budgetary restrictions, and limitations to the tax base because of citizen intervention (such as California's Proposition 13).
- Lack of a clear plan or process through which the board can address curriculum policies.

- Constraints in setting aside sufficient time to allow the board to fully analyze curriculum issues and to develop strategic plans for meeting them.

Among *mental barriers* to effective curriculum, policy-making are:

- Tendencies among board members to defer to administrators as the experts on curriculum.
- "Backing off" from curriculum policies that are met with resistance or opposition from administrators, teachers, or other influential groups.
- Lack of sufficient knowledge of curriculum issues and strategies.
- Boards that have constant changes in membership or that are politically or philosophically divided.

But take heart. The presence of these barriers does not indicate that boards should avoid becoming fully involved in curriculum policy-making. On the contrary, these barriers document the board's need to be involved and to involve the community and the school district staff in the policy-making process.

What The Commission Calls The Right Curriculum

The Commission stated that "whatever the student's educational or work objectives, knowledge of the 'New Basics' is the foundation of success for the afterschool years and, therefore, forms the core of the modern curriculum."

This may—or may not—be true in any given community. If the board intends to develop a curriculum that reflects the community's values of excellence, it may wish to use its surveys to measure *local response* to the Commission's suggestions in what should be basic to a curriculum program.

The Commission suggested that:

- The teaching of English in high school should equip graduates to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and use what they read; to write well-organized effective papers; to listen and discuss issues well; and to gain a sense of our heritage of literacy.
- The teaching of math should include geometry and algebra; an understanding of elementary probability and statistics; the ability to apply math to everyday situations; and the ability to estimate, measure, and test the accuracy of these calculations.
- The teaching of science should introduce students to the concepts, laws, and processes of physical and biological science; help them to identify methods of scientific reasoning and inquiry, and to apply science to everyday life; and introduce students to the social and environmental implications of the development of science and technology.
- The teaching of social studies should help students fix their places in society, understand the ideas that historically have shaped our world, grasp the basics of our economy, and know the difference between free and repressive societies.

- The teaching of computer science should equip students to understand the computer's functions as a tool for information, computation, and communications, and that computers should be used in school and personal work.

In addition to these five "New Basics," the Commission also recommends that foreign language studies be started in elementary schools, that at least two years of foreign language be required of high school graduates planning to attend college, and that fine arts and vocational education be enhanced in high school to reflect students' personal educational and occupational goals.

The Commission also suggested that the eight grades leading to high school be used as the seeding ground for acquainting students with the "New Basics," and for fostering "an enthusiasm for learning and development of the individual's gifts and talents."

The Board's Route To The Right Curriculum

Given the weight of the Commission's call, it is understandable that a board member (who, after all, has "other fish to fry" at home and at work) might be heard to wail: "Where am I going to find the time to contend with all of this?"

Here is a place where keeping a historical perspective helps. If—as the Commission and the President suggest—the current plight of education is the result of two decades of neglecting educational excellence, then it is reasonable to assume that the "rearmament" of education also will be long-term. The purpose of the "manufacturing" process presented in this publication is to provide board members with a tool for focusing on how to *begin* setting a new course for education.

That new beginning should seem less ominous if board members approach curriculum development as a long-term commitment—one that requires research and policy development, oversight, and evaluation. None of this can—or should—happen overnight; and the board does not have to meet the commitment alone. The board has numerous resources to tap to assist in the effort, including the school staff and the community.

Another source of comfort is to remember that the board's role in curriculum development is not all-encompassing. The board usually deals with policy issues in parameters broad enough to allow some administrative flexibility in implementing policies.

To ensure excellence in the school curriculum, a board will undertake these important tasks:

- Develop curriculum and instruction policy that proclaims, generally or specifically, the board's instructional beliefs, expectations, and priorities.
- Shape and reshape goals for instruction, whether they be initially grounded in the "Three Rs," the "New Basics," "Thinking and Problem-Solving Abilities," or otherwise.
- Provide curriculum guidance, including defining what are basics, frills, core curriculum, and electives.

- Support the curriculum with finances specifically targeted toward meeting the school system's instructional goals for excellence.
- Determine staff and financial support for various special instructional programs (gifted students, remedial classwork, alternative schools, shut-in programs, preschool, and so on).
- Provide guidance for and oversee the selection of textbooks and instructional material.
- Balance the curriculum to provide equal opportunity for all learners to perform to the best of their ability and to receive both basic and enrichment instruction.
- Provide for quality teaching by setting high standards for competency and backing them up with adequate resources with which to attract, train, and maintain the most highly skilled administrators and teachers.
- Set competency standards and graduation requirements for students.
- Establish codes for discipline and policies on other issues relative to the learning environment.
- Ensure there is a systematic program for monitoring and evaluating student progress and achievement.
- Monitor innovations in education and provide for regular review of policies.

Each of these board tasks has a direct connection to the process of making effective policies. The board's first step in interpreting what is excellent at the local level is to conduct internal audits of the school system—audits involving superintendents, principals, teachers, students, parents and other patrons of the district.

Only by determining what is being done in the schools can board members effectively assess what should be done in light of local expectations for excellence.

Moreover, the board's audits or assessments should take three additional factors into account:

- One, recent research into policy development seems to indicate that clearly-written board policies in areas of curriculum development, human resource development and collective bargaining can directly or indirectly affect excellence. (*See following charts for a catalogue of policies related to excellence.*)
- Second, a school district's instructional program ultimately will reflect the board's view on how to best fit community expectations for education into the dollars the community is willing to approve for education. As such, the instructional program has the potential to be anything from a collection of dry facts to a truly dynamic plan for excellence.
- Third, how far the board is permitted to pursue excellence through its policies, goals and objectives will be determined directly by the level of public support for the board's efforts. This fact puts the premium on involving others in the board's assessment and policy-making activities.

Policies Related to Excellence

Here are a number of policy topics that have a direct or indirect effect on the quality of education that is provided. These 70 policy topics, which are divided into three major areas of board responsibility, were identified through research efforts sponsored by a grant in 1982-83 to the National School Boards Association from the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the grant was to promote "Excellence through School Board Policies."

This list of policies is meant only to be a guide to a board in developing policies that promote excellence in the schools. It is not meant to be comprehensive. Many state school boards associations have some type of policy service that is available for local school boards. Therefore, a given board may wish to contact this source first. The policy topics listed below relate significantly to the policies classified in the NSBA Educational Policies Service, which makes it easy to obtain samples of the policies listed. Samples and corresponding analysis of policies relating to excellence will be available in 1984 through the NSBA State Association Management Information Network and the EPS/NSBA Policy Information Clearinghouse operated in cooperation with their state school boards associations.

Policy Areas Related to Curriculum Strategies

Teaching Methods
School District Goals and Objectives
Staff Conduct
Curriculum Development and Design
Instructional Goals
Special Programs Administration
Instructional Arrangements
Guidance Program
Commitment to Accomplishment
Class Interruptions
School Building Administration
Educational Philosophy
Student, Staff and Community Involvement in Decision-Making
Scheduling for Instruction
Instructional Services
Academic Achievement
Staff-Student Relations
Grading
Graduation Requirements
Student Assignments to Classes
Recognition for Accomplishment
Homework
Testing Program
Student/Parent Conferences
Cocurricular and Extracurricular Programs
Accomplishment Reporting to the Public
Grouping for Instruction
Evaluation of Instructional Programs
Student Discipline and Conduct

Policy Areas Related to Human Resource Development

- Staff Hiring and Recruiting
- Staff Personnel Policies Goals
- Staff Involvement in Decision-Making
- Staff Conduct
- Line and Staff Relations
- Staff Complaints and Grievances
- Staff Positions/Job Descriptions
- Staff Evaluation and Supervision
- Staff Assignment and Transfer
- Staff Orientation
- Staff Development and Training
- Staff Reduction-in-Force
- Staff-Student Relations
- Staff Compensation Plans
- Staff Incentives
- School Building Administration
- Staff Fringe Benefits
- Staff Probation and Tenure
- Recognition for Accomplishment
- Arrangements for Substitutes
- Staff Meetings
- Teaching Methods
- Management Team
- Staff Work Load

Policy Initiatives Related to Collective Bargaining

- Staff Involvement in Decision-Making
- Staff Extra Duty
- Staff Leaves and Absences
- Staff Work Load
- Staff Meetings
- Staff Teaching Methods
- School Calendar/Day
- Staff Time Schedules
- Staff Reduction-in-Force
- Staff Assignment and Transfers
- Staff Fringe Benefits
- Staff Compensation/Salary Plans
- Substitute Staff Employment
- Staff Seniority
- Staff Supervision and Evaluation
- Staff Suspension and Dismissal

A Process Approach To The Right Curriculum

Being able to meet the community's definition of "excellence" makes the educational "manufacturing" process approach to curriculum development attractive. Here is a step-by-step analysis of how and where a board's surveying and goal-setting efforts can be applied to curriculum development.

Step one: Involve the public. Inherent in the process of curriculum reform is the likelihood that partisanship will be evinced on many major issues.

Partisanship may arise naturally out of philosophical conflicts in the community (such as conservative vs. liberal; basics vs. expanded learning opportunities), or along political party lines. If, for example, the board elects to reduce some extracurricular activities—such as band or athletic

activities—in favor of greater emphasis on the core curriculum, it is likely that the affected parents and students will protest cuts in programs they strongly favor.

Obviously, leadership and some statesmanship will be imperatives for the board. The first step in developing these qualities is identifying the public in broad terms. The following chart characterizes these various groups.

Typical Audiences of Local School Boards

External

- Parents
- Civic groups
- Neighborhood improvement groups
- City and county governments
- Business people
- Minority groups
- Church and other religious groups
- Nonparent taxpayer
- News media
- Service clubs
- Youth sports

Internal

- Superintendent
- Other top administrative staff
- Principals
- Teachers
- Counselors
- Custodial and food service personnel
- Teacher aides and volunteers
- School bus drivers
- Office staff
- Consultants
- Students

Special

- State and Federal governments
- State and Federal courts
- State boards of education
- School boards associations
- Employee labor unions

At the same time, the board should keep a singular perspective in terms of where the process is leading. At some point, the board must decide to approve or accept changes or additions to the district's mix of instructional programs or to accept or reject proposals for modification in various programs.

Here are several things board members can do to influence curriculum content while preserving public participation:

- Reduce the board's goals and expectations to a comprehensive survey, and distribute the survey to a representative sample of the school community.
- Otherwise encourage public participation in the process. (For example, as indicated earlier, the board may wish to establish study

committees or task forces to assess various aspects of the curriculum. Lay representation in these groups will broaden the perspective of the assessment.)

- As often as practical, provide time on the board's agenda for additional public discussion of the findings and issues relating to curriculum content.

KEY TIP

Respect the views of specialists who come before the board, but be skeptical and ask questions to clarify major points. Too, be sensitive and attentive to special interest groups as a matter of good politics, and use their input to assess how the curriculum might best be balanced to reflect their needs.

- If administrators or professional staff propose curriculum adjustments, do not simply "rubber stamp" the board's approval on them. Instead, widely disseminate these proposals and encourage public comment on them.
- Whenever the board initiates a curriculum project of any importance, encourage the full participation of all constituencies.
- If board agendas are too crowded with other school matters, schedule special meetings or public hearings through which the board can receive public input on the curriculum.

Step two: Involve the schools. Research indicates that schools which produce positive learning outcomes operate best when their curriculum content reflects district-wide curriculum goals, and when the school staff is committed to achieving those district-wide goals.

Obviously, giving some sense of "pride of authorship" to the professional staff who must teach the curriculum is a key ingredient in the district-wide commitment to excellence. The board should:

- Involve teachers and other staff in the same surveys, hearings, and other input activities afforded to the public in step one of this process.
- Set out specific tasks that involve the professional community and support staffs in an assessment of the physical plant, the finances, and the instructional goals of the district. This assessment should determine the present capacity of the schools to respond to the various goals identified by the board. It also should result in identification of areas in which additional public support, capital investment, or program expenditures are indicated in order to meet the board's goals.

Step three: Involve the administration. A district-wide commitment to excellence portends implementing policies that are workable and manageable in the "real world" of operating a school district. To ensure that its policies are practical, the board should fully involve the superintendent and other key administrators in policy-making and goal-setting, and in the analysis of input from the public and the professional community.

In addition, the board should involve the administration by:

- Encouraging the superintentent to assume a large share of the leadership burden. The superintendent should encourage other administrators to respond to survey materials and should ensure that all elements of the public and the school community have been invited to participate in the assessment of curriculum content.
- Allowing administrators to take a significant and large role in recommending—but not dictating—policies that will meet the board's goals, balance community interests, and be workable within the budget and other resources of the district.
- Directing the administration to provide for frequent reports (and, periodically, formal evaluations) of the relevancy of the district's curriculum policies to the board's and community's goals for educational excellence.

Step four: Determine curriculum policies. Once the board has weighed the input from its three major constituencies (internal, external, and special)—and once the board has recognized special mandates or directives from its special constituencies—it then should decide how formally its policy language should define its goals. To move toward excellence, the board must also:

- Determine how progress towards the goals will be monitored.
- Set a schedule for periodic evaluation of the district's instructional program.
- Either through policy or management directives, guide the administration on how the instructional program is to be implemented. These policies or directives *must* indicate clearly how administrative responsibilities will be aligned to:
  - — Carrying the assessment process forward through the schools and, ultimately, to the patrons of the schools system.
  - — Determining the time and resources necessary to make the instructional program work at the building level.
  - — Providing for continuous monitoring and evaluation of progress in implementing the curriculum on a district-wide level.
  - — Providing for "quality control" up and down a chain of command that links the community to the schools, the schools to the administration, and the administration to the school board.

V
Standards and Expectations: The Missing Link Between Curriculum Goals and Excellence

"In 13 states, 50 percent or more of the units required for high school graduation may be electives selected by the student. Given this freedom to choose the substance of half or more of their education, many students opt for less demanding personal service courses, such as bachelor living."

—National Commission on Excellence in Education

If the board's expression of educational goals provides the framework for the district's instructional program, its policies expressing standards and expectations for education provide the "machinery" for implementing curriculum and for measuring the performance of students, teachers, and administrators.

In the "real world" of the schools, implementing curriculum goals may take many shapes. For example, a board seeking a slow, orderly course to curriculum reform may first concentrate its efforts on upgrading English and reading comprehension skills, then later move to mathematics and science. Conversely, a board under local pressure to move on the Commission's recommendations might choose to tackle the full curriculum in a single, blanket sweep. Regardless, it is important that board members concern themselves with interpreting the curriculum as a pattern which will serve students as they move from grade level to grade level.

Fitting curricular pieces together will require a firm grasp on what is—and is not—substantive curricular revision. Dedicating teaching efforts to upgrading math and science instruction is one example of substantive curriculum revision. Merely changing to updated textbooks for English and history is not.

A Question of Board Control

Ironically, the Commission's implementing recommendations for standards and expectations were more narrowly defined than those on curriculum. They were specific enough, in fact, to raise the question of whether the Commission's report, if it is accepted by the public as the path to excellence, will preempt some degree of board control and flexibility in setting local standards for education.

Consider some of the Commission's key recommendations:

- That grades in school reflect actual student achievement.
- That colleges and universities raise their admission standards to reflect proficiency in the "New Basics" which can be validated through standardized testing.
- That textbooks be upgraded.
- That board textbook selection procedures be more rigorous and discerning.
- That instructional materials include application of current technology, and reflect the best scholarship in each discipline and the most current research in learning and teaching.

From a cursory review of these items, one will note that a number of them will constitute significant cost implications to be carried out. Yet, these recommendations deserve a closer look. They demand an understanding of how they might impact on board policy options and underscore the importance of board reliance on a formal process to assure that policies on standards fairly reflect the local community's expectations for quality in education.

Any board wishing to accomplish the "localization" of standards and expectations for excellence likely will find that the Commission's report raises as many questions as it answers.

The latter thought is not offered to imply the Commission has not offered its agenda for excellence thoughtfully. Rather, it is intended to suggest that local school board members should use the explicit and implicit "food for thought" in the Commission's report as the basis for equally thoughtful deliberation.

Questions Concerning Grade Levels

The Commission suggests that grades should be "indicators of academic achievement" which can be relied on as evidence of a student's preparedness for further study.

There is nothing inherently wrong in such a presumption. However, it raises a number of potentially staggering questions.

For example, if student readiness is the sole judgement on which promotion to a higher grade level is based, what then does the board do with underachievers? Are they to be locked into a grade level for an indefinite period or until they tire of trying and drop out of school?

How much will retaining these students for additional instructional years cost at the local level? How do these costs compare with the societal costs of turning out students who are unprepared for further study or for entry into the workplace? Or, as a theoretical matter, is it wise to

base education on a system in which a student's age determines both entry and judgements of how well the student is progressing? If so, then how does the board contend with research indicating that students learn at different paces and that, given enough time, most students eventually can master the basic education put before them?

Comparatively Speaking

Universal agreement exists among educational researchers who believe that, in order for American students to be prepared to face the challenges of an increasingly complex and technological world, educational standards must be upgraded:

- **The *Carnegie* report is extensive, setting out a dozen strategies that would qualify as expectations for school excellence. Of these, Carnegie lists four top priorities: mastery of English, a core curriculum with a global view, better working conditions for teachers, and the addition of a requirement that each high school student complete at least one unit of volunteer work in the community or in the schools in order to make education relevant to the world beyond the campus.**
- **The *National Science Board* suggests that "rigorous high school graduation standards" be established and that school systems abolish the practice of social or courtesy promotion of students.**
- **The *ECS Task Force* similarly calls upon districts to make grade promotion contingent on mastery instead of age. It also calls upon states and communities to identify clearly the skills they expect the schools to impart. It suggests, too, that schools operate with firm, explicit, and demanding requirements for discipline, attendance, homework, grades, and other essential elements of effective schooling.**
- **In his studies, *Goodlad* included data confirming the need of setting clear educational goals at both the state and local level.**

Questions Concerning College Admission Standards

The Commission's call for specific and rigorous admission standards also is fraught with implications.

If, indeed, universities and colleges require four years of English, three years each of science and math, three years of social studies, and two years of foreign language studies, are the board's curriculum options not limited? Perhaps not, if community standards see public education as preparation for entering the workplace; definitely, if public standards are for college preparatory schools.

If the board must dedicate time and money to specific subjects dictated by colleges and universities, what other courses are affected? Do some "fringe" electives get the axe? Is learning to drive or to cook—or learning to solve complex geometric equations—more relevant to living in today's world? How is such a judgement made in a world in which

far more people drive automobiles and cook than apply complex computations in their work or everyday lives?

If college entrance is to be determined by test-verified proficiency in the five "New Basics" and foreign languages, do these institutions of higher learning then assume the burden from public schools for teaching values and high-order skills such as logic and reasoning?

Questions About Standardized Testing

In suggesting national (but not federal) standardized tests (but not aptitude tests) as the means for measuring student achievement and for providing the basis for either remedial or accelerated intervention, the Commission, again, creates the opportunity for thoughtful questioning.

For example, is such a national standard workable? Will the need for generalization result in raising standards or merely in creating a new set of "minimum" standards? A national standard may raise the level of education, but will it do any more than present standards to encourage achievement above minimum expectations?

How would nationally administered tests be adjusted for cultural or ethnic differences? Is it reasonable to assume that one basic educational standard will meet the diverse needs of students in Brooklyn, New York; Des Moines, Iowa; Sacramento, California; and Delight, Arkansas?

Comparatively Speaking

There is a common call for improved documentation of student progress among the major researchers of quality in education:

- **The *National Science Board* calls for a new, improved national assessment mechanism. It says efforts should be made at the local, state, and federal levels to disseminate test results and to "promote the recognition that 'excellence in education' should be the standard for all students."**
- **The *ECS Task Force* stresses the importance of states and local school districts providing measurement of student progress through periodic tests of general achievement and specific skills.**
- **The *Carnegie* report suggests that a new national student achievement and advisement test be developed, and that efforts be made at the federal level to monitor what happens to each graduating class once it leaves the public schools.**
- ***Goodlad* documents the need to measure student progress in noting, "Those who start out with the least success and satisfaction end up with the least. One could argue that this is life. And if we want our schools to reflect rather accurately life in the surrounding society, then our schools do a superb job. If, on the other hand, our desire is to produce successive generations of young people, all of whom have the general education required for successful participation in society and all of whom experience satisfaction, then we fail miserably."**

Questions On Textbooks

The Commission suggests that textbooks be updated, and certified by the publisher as to their quality and appropriateness. It also suggests that, before textbooks and other curriculum materials are adopted, they should be evaluated by state and local boards for evidence of rigorous and challenging material.

Are these really judgements board members are qualified to make? Is the board's role in these matters directive or active? How are boards to fit these criteria into community standards? Can the board go beyond these mandates?

How often should this updating and upgrading be done? Does the board have the money to do even a *current* upgrading of its educational materials? What current materials are due for replacement?

If the board does tackle upgrading its texts, is there any guarantee that teachers can use the materials effectively? What does the board do about research that suggests students are not necessarily encouraged to learn by tougher subject matter?

If texts do help to stiffen curriculum outcomes, what implications exist in terms of creating a new core of underachievers? Have students, for example, had sufficient exposure to prerequisites for understanding new theories or approaches which might be included in the new texts? Will tougher texts make it more difficult for parents to assist their children with homework or with remedial intervention outside of the school climate? If so, will the board address this issue?

Some Typical Textbook Policy Considerations

The board's role in providing texts and other instructional materials has three aspects. One is setting guidelines for the selection of materials; the second is allocating the funds to purchase the materials; and the third is giving its final approval on the materials recommended for adoption.

The board's policy guidance typically might include language:

- **On the need to supply up-to-date and educationally valid materials.**
- **To assure materials are consistent with district philosophy and goals.**
- **To assure supplies are adequate for the number of students in school.**
- **That determines what range of instructional media will be employed.**
- **On how evaluation of materials will be made, and how often.**
- **On who's involved in the selection process.**

Source: Becoming a Better Board Member (NSBA 1982).

Questions On Providing Other Instructional Media

The Commission also suggests that modern technology, implying computers, be brought into the classroom when appropriate. Boards may respond by first asking themselves if "large

ticket" items like computers are affordable. Are teachers with the specific skills to teach these new technologies available? Can support from industry be expected? If so, what form should this support take?

Questions Regarding "The Best Scholarship"

The Commission also recommended that all instructional materials reflect the best scholarship in each discipline, as well as the best research on teaching and learning.

Who determines the "best scholarship" in each discipline? What are disciplines? Is, for example, vocational education a discipline? What can be done to upgrade the importance of teaching vocational and technical skills?

Which school of present research is valid? Is it research which says environmental factors outside the schools have the most to do with how well students learn? Or is it research which says that carefully controlled school environments can reverse the effects of outside influences and produce positive student performances?

One More Question: Are There Answers?

All of these questions about grades, admission standards, testing, textbooks, and instructional materials and methods are tough; and there is no universal set of answers for board members to draw upon.

For that reason alone, board members must apply some tool of order—a process—for assessing their standards. The process in this publication, again, suggests that standards set by the board will best reflect community expectations when board members have involved all elements of the community:

- *The public* by including questions concerning expected outcomes of education in survey materials.
- *The teachers* through similar survey materials and through participation in curriculum reviews, selection of textbooks and other materials, and in educational program evaluations.
- *The administration* through interactive planning, monitoring, and evaluating of community expectations, school capabilities, district goals, and the various trends in educational research.

If the board successfully involves all of these elements in assessing which standards will deliver the expected outcomes of education, it may not build a national consensus on excellence. It will establish something more vital, though: agreement that the local schools are providing the best education that can be expected within the constraints of local finances.

If that occurs in enough local communities, it is likely that, if not a consensus, at least a national commitment on quality education will be evinced at the grassroots level.

VI
Time, Teaching, Leadership, and Fiscal Support: The Schools' Focal Points for Productivity

"Let me hasten to point out that America's children are just as smart as they ever were. But most of them do less than an hour of homework a night. Many have abandoned vocational and college prep courses for general ones. When they graduate from high school, they're prepared for neither work nor higher education."

—Ronald Reagan, President of the United States

Recent analyses of decline in American industrial competitiveness often have pointed accusatory fingers in the direction of U.S. productivity. Many researchers suggest that American workers spend more time less effectively to produce products of lower quality than do their foreign counterparts.

In its report, the Commission made startlingly similar assertions concerning productivity in the schools.

The Commission found "three disturbing facts about the use American schools and students make of time: (1) compared to other nations, American students spend less time on school work; (2) time spent in the classroom and on homework often is used ineffectively; and (3) schools are not doing enough to help students develop either the study skills required to use time well or the willingness to spend more time on school work."

The Commission also found that not enough academically able students are being attracted to the teaching profession, that teacher preparation programs need substantial improvement, that the present professional working life of teachers is unacceptable, and that serious shortages of teachers exist in key areas.

All of these findings, of course, bear a direct link to the costs of education, and—put together in a package—serve as the schools' focal points for improving productivity. No readily available remedy has been suggested to finance or support those costs.

Some Old And Familiar Questions

The Commission's findings on time, teaching, leadership, and finances raise some old, but familiar, questions that are central to determining the course of American education:

- Who is to be taught?
- What are they to be taught?
- Who will teach?
- How will they teach?
- Who will pay for the teaching?

For many years, board members have been grappling with these sensible questions but, according to the Commission's report and a significant portion of public opinion, have come up with an inadequate set of answers.

Now comes the Commission with an apparent set of answers which largely narrow the focus of the questions to determining what can be done to influence learning outcomes. A closer look at the Commission's findings will indicate that its dozen-and-a-half distinguished members—who admitted to being "impressed during the course of its activities by the diversity of opinion it received regarding the condition of American education and by conflicting views about what should be done"—have offered recommendations closely tracking two somewhat related present approaches to increasing productivity at the classroom level: controlling environmental facts at the classroom level and manipulating student outcomes by revising and limiting curriculum to a greater emphasis on rigorous core subject mastery.

Board members seeking to use the Commission's report as the basis for interpreting excellence should be aware that, despite the early positive indications that learning outcomes can be manipulated at the school level, a significant body of *prior* research raises numerous questions about the efficacy of learning-outcomes programs. The basis for these questions includes:

- The comprehensive body of past research which indicates classroom factors have little to do with learning outcomes.
- The reality that narrowly defining effectiveness in terms of instructional outcomes relies heavily on standardized tests which do little to measure philosophies, principles, values, and their relationship skills—all key theoretical goals of education.
- That effectiveness research models presume—without sufficient scientific documentation as to *how* school factors impact teaching and learning—that cultural and organizational variables can be manipulated at the classroom level.
- That approaches which aggregate data at the school level to describe the global nature of education without recognizing that subtle variables within (rather than among) schools make "apples to apples" comparisons of effective and ineffective schools more difficult.

To restate an earlier point, then, boards should rely on the "manufacturing process" to preserve flexibility in setting goals, developing workable objectives, evaluating programs and measuring results. The process approach gives the board the option to "go back to the drawing board" if it finds that further developments in the research of effective schooling warrant changes in the district's program.

The Commission's Views of Time

The Commission concluded that students and teachers must spend more time on educational tasks, and that time should be expended through better classroom and program management, through longer school days and academic years, and through heavier homework loads. Specifically, the Commission recommended:

- Students in high school receive more homework.
- Instruction in effective study methods begin in lower grades and continue throughout schooling.
- Individual school systems and states consider 7-hour days and 200 to 220-day academic years.
- Better classroom management and provisions of time for remedial and gifted students requiring more diversified subjects.
- Uniformly enforced codes of conduct, and consideration of alternative classrooms or schools for continually disruptive students in order to lessen the burdens on teachers to enforce discipline.
- Attendance policies with clear incentives and sanctions to reduce loss of instructional time to tardiness or absenteeism.
- Reducing administrative work performed by teachers, and other nonteaching disruptions in the school day.
- Placement and grouping of students, as well as promotion and graduation policies, based on academic achievement, rather than on the student's particular age.

Some key questions arise. Again, the Commission's recommendations bear food for thought. Indeed, they require analysis as much for what they imply as for what they explicitly stress.

Homework, for example, will extend the learning day at very little apparent rise in costs. But caution is called for: If one hour's homework is assigned to each subject area in the "New Basics," students will be studying a minimum of five to six hours more a day.

What, then, are the likely impacts at home? Will students still have adequate time to pursue extracurricular activities? To do household chores? To hold down an afterschool job? To engage in social and other life-enrichment activities?

Will grading homework take classroom time away from teachers? Or will teachers be expected to grade homework on their own time? Will it require hiring more classroom aides or utilizing volunteers?

Similarly, effective study skills may be of significant value in learning. But, are there sufficient numbers of teachers qualified to teach these

skills? What are the financial implications of acquiring textbooks and other materials? Will adding courses in this area mean deleting other courses from the curriculum?

There also are financial implications in other areas of the Commission's views:

- What will the costs be for lengthening school days or years? For fully staffing and maintaining buildings for the extra hours or days? Of compensating teachers who lose some options in securing part-time or summer jobs?
- What costs are involved in providing remedial and gifted student instruction? How much will it cost to develop and procure specialized texts for these kinds of specialized study? To locate and employ teaching specialists in the field? To maintain counseling and testing services needed to identify such students?
- Where will the space for alternative classrooms or schools come from? What will specialists or new teaching staffs cost?
- If attendance is a criterion for completing a year, how will "make up" time be assessed, staffed, and paid for? What levels of community support are available for intervention when external environmental factors are the cause of absenteeism?
- If performance, not age, determines a student's pace of learning, how much will it cost to keep the student in school for 13 or 14 years—rather than 12? What resources must be invested to study the moral and disciplinary questions inherent in mixing students of various levels of maturity together in classes?

Obviously, all of these questions—and dozens more—deserve attention and considerable effort by the board to balance community standards and expectations with commonsense recognition of social and educational realities.

What Current Effectiveness Approaches Indicate

Effectiveness approaches to schooling seem to depend on some rigid principles for managing time at the classroom level.

Among them are:

- Effective use of all instructional time.
- A commitment to an intensified emphasis on learning.
- An orderly school climate that minimizes teaching disruptions.
- Time set aside for continuous evaluation of feedback from teachers and students.
- Structured content and time governed by the requirements necessary to cover the content.
- Major instructional efforts devoted to skills mastery in both basics and higher-order skills, such as thinking and reasoning.
- Provisions for varied learning opportunities and for individualized instruction.

And Some Other Views

Some researchers believe schools work better when the curriculum is manipulated through such techniques as:

- Compressing texts and instructional plans to devote less time to specifics, but coupling the compression with homework, outside reading, and other course requirements which demand students to self-learn.
- Eliminating age-related grade assignments to allow students to learn at their own pace; but, as an incentive to the student to learn and progress, requiring mastery of subject matter as the criterion for advancement.
- Giving administrators overall management responsibility, but delegating more specific management tasks to teachers to promote flexibility in the development of lesson plans.

The Commission's Views On Teaching

Recognition of teacher responsibilities was a key aspect of the Commission's report. It recommended that:

- Persons seeking to become teachers meet high standards, demonstrate an aptitude for teaching, and show competence in an academic discipline.
- Salaries for teachers be increased to compare with other industries; and that they be performance-based and tied to an effective evaluation system that includes peer review so that good teachers are rewarded, average teachers encouraged, and poor teachers improved or terminated.
- School boards adopt an 11-month contract for teachers to allow more time for curriculum and professional development, programs for students with special needs, and more adequate compensation.
- School boards, administrators, and teachers cooperatively develop career ladders distinguishing between beginner, established, and master teachers.
- Substantial nonschool resources be employed to solve present teacher shortages, including the use of qualified noncertified experts to teach core subjects.
- Incentives such as grants or loans be used to attract outstanding students to the teaching profession.
- Master teachers be involved in designing teacher preparation courses and in supervising teachers in their probationary years.

What makes teachers effective? Current research indicates that a strong relationship exists between teaching efforts and learning outcomes. Typically, the dimensions of an effective teaching environment includes:

- High expectations for teaching excellence.
- Ability to provide visible rewards for student academic growth.
- Cooperation and group activity in the classroom.
- Total staff involvement in school improvement.

- Greater autonomy and flexibility in implementing directives from the administration.
- A high degree of teacher empathy and interaction with students.
- Emphasis on homework and effective study techniques.
- Acceptance of teacher accountability for measurable learning outcomes.
- Clear strategies for encouraging learning and involving students in interacting with accomplished peers, and sufficient time and staffing levels for promoting individualized instruction.

Similarly, those engaged in research on the teaching-learning process suggest that teaching professionals will be most effective when:

- Staffing levels are adequate to allow instruction to focus on similar classes.
- Less specialization in teaching takes place (that is, the same teacher handling more core subjects and the same group of students).
- Management structures provide autonomy in implementing instructional programs and other directives.
- Career ladders are utilized which recognize that salaries and the assignment of responsibilities should increase in proportion to experience and demonstrated achievement.

Comparatively Speaking

The need to upgrade both the working conditions and proficiency of members of the teaching profession is a theme common to all of the major studies on educational excellence.

- **The *National Science Board* stresses that the skills and understanding of many current teachers must be upgraded. Likewise, the Board calls for training of all incoming teachers, and suggests that interim programs using nontraditional sources—such as industry and military experts on computers, science, and technology—be employed until critical shortages of qualified teachers are eliminated.**

- ***The ECS Task Force* expresses the need to hold educators in higher regard; to improve the recruitment, training, and pay of teachers; to make teacher pay comparable to the salaries paid by other professions; to offer teachers financial incentives keyed to responsibility and specialized skills; and to establish career ladders and other forms of recognition such as scholarships, bonuses, and other tributes to quality teachers.**

- ***Carnegie* calls for better salaries, federal assistance for teacher training, more time to teach, and opportunities for independent study. It also suggests that the learning environment be enhanced by allowing opportunities for varied teaching methods, student participation and accountability, and greater local control being exerted over textbooks.**

- ***Goodlad* acknowledges the role of teachers and their desire to be integral to the educational program, its design and execution.**

The Commission's Views of Leadership and Finances

It is obvious that committing to the enhancement of the quality of working life for the teaching profession has as many financial implications as does increasing the amount of time students and teachers are in school.

The Commission recommended that educators and elected officials be held accountable for providing leadership, and that citizens be accountable for providing the means with which to finance excellence. It also called for a substantial federal government role in providing revenues and meeting social responsibilities likely to be beyond the reach of states and localities.

In addition, the Commission specifically called upon school board members to:

- Provide principals and superintendents with the resources for career development necessary to assure these educators are able to provide effective leadership.
- Recognize that, although managerial and supervisory skills are important for administrators to master, leadership skills involving persuasion, goal-setting, and developing community consensus should be stressed.
- Recognize that the *primary responsibility* for financing and governing the schools rests with state and local officials, including school board members, who must incorporate educational reforms into their policies and financial planning.

Comparatively Speaking

While the *National Science Board* was specific about estimating the need for $1.51 billion in increased federal funding for education, the *ECS Task Force* and *Carnegie* suggested that federal, state, and local financing were all important.

***Carnegie*, however, brought an additional source into its recommendations, suggesting that "schools need the help of industry and business, and business needs the schools." It proposed a number of school and business partnerships, and encouraged business to provide:**

- **Help for disadvantaged students through tutorial and family counseling services, and by supporting part-time apprentice experiences for high risk students.**
- **Enrichment programs for gifted students through scholarships, field trips, and tutorial services.**
- **Cash awards to outstanding teachers, as well as establishing Endowed Chair Programs in the schools.**
- **Grants for principal sabbaticals.**
- **A discretionary fund for principals to work with teachers on creative programs.**
- **Providing sponsorship of a facilities and equipment program to help schools improve their physical plant and science labs.**

In the view of Joan Parent, President of the National School Boards Association, whether the subject is leadership in supervision, leadership in policy development, or leadership in securing finances for the schools, board members must seek to lead the public back to a point of confidence in the schools.

"To gain and keep that confidence," Dr. Parent says, "we must have confidence in the quality of our schools. The key is determining the needs in each of our communities, assessing the extent of those needs, and exercising the leadership to meet them.

"Is that not, after all, what being a school board member is all about?"

Like many other leaders in education, Dr. Parent feels it is important for board members to ask tough questions about what is actually happening in the schools at the local level. She recommends that boards audit their schools, and when indicated, provide the necessary leadership—in all appropriate areas—to correct public perceptions of the schools: "If your school district is measuring up, an audit will demonstrate that worth and provide answers for critics," she says. "And if changes are indicated, you can and should be the catalyst for positive change."

Elements of Effective Leadership

Research has identified several key areas of leadership that seem to contribute to effective schools. Schools are most effective when the board and district employees have provided for:

- **A positive overall school climate.**
- **Clearly focused and obtainable goals and objectives.**
- **Commitment to those goals by the full staff.**
- **District-wide support of these goals.**
- **Fitting of the goals into long-range planning and coordination.**
- **Effective classroom management by teachers.**
- **Attention to inservice and other teacher training.**
- **Preserving continuity and stability in key staff assignments.**

Studies suggest refining goals to a short, simple, and clearly defined list; stressing classwork that challenges students to reason and express themselves; providing lower class loads as a means of locating additional instructional time; and connecting schools with the "outside world" by making classwork relevant to present-day applications or by offering specific student incentives, such as student work-release programs that award credit for school-related job experiences.

Applying The Process Approach To Productivity Goals

There is no question that school boards face a huge procedural and financial task in seeking to improve the overall productivity of the nation's schools. But, again, approaching local efforts as the beginning of a long-term commitment to excellence affords board members the opportunity to use the process in this publication to answer the "who, what, and how" of providing education that meets community needs and expectations.

Properly designed survey materials and orderly steps for receiving input from each affected group in the community will provide the board with a thoughtful basis for balancing:

- *Public input* on curriculum, goals, standards, and expectations; roles of parents and teachers; and the willingness to pay for education.
- *Teacher input* on various quality-of-working-life issues, such as curriculum, goals, teaching methods, career ladders, evaluation tools, salary expectations, and improvements to school facilities.
- *Administrative input* on the interpretation of curriculum and learning goals, on workable plans for managing and delegating authority and responsibility, and on priorities for the allocation of human and financial resources.

VII
Implementing the Process and Measuring Outcomes

Although the findings of researchers may change (perhaps even radically), some of the traditional manners in which school district management is distributed, and the fundamental relationships between levels of management will not be altered.

In many states, statutes will define what the board can and cannot delegate to its superintendent. But there are a number of key areas in which the board will maintain its traditional role of providing policy guidance that clearly indicates how the administration and others are to translate the district's goals and deliver education back through the educational "manufacturing" process to the district's patrons.

A board's major function, of course, is to develop and adopt policies for the governance of the schools. School governance policies that most affect excellence include those related to:

- Employment of district staff.
- Administration of pupil services.
- Administration of educational programs.
- Selection of texts and other materials.
- Administration of and expectations for building operations.
- Securing of support services.
- Allocation of resources.

(For a comprehensive list of policy topics deemed to have a direct or indirect impact on the quality of education, see *Policies Related to Excellence*, page 53.)

Perhaps more important than *what* board policies cover is *how* they are to be interpreted and implemented to ensure that the ultimate educational "product" is what the board and its community expect.

It is important, then, for the board to use its process to both receive data through which to assess what parents, students, other patrons, teachers, other staff and administrators expect *and* to ensure that as the policies are interpreted and implemented, the educational "product" returned from the board to the administration to the schools to the community, i.e., patrons, parents and students, meets those expectations. Ultimately, an excellent school is one which the community perceives as excellent, one which they will support, and one to which they will send their children.

A Simplified Look At the Process

If the process is simplified by looking at various "players" involved in the "manufacture" of education it breaks down into two distinct brackets.

The "upper bracket" serves as the board's vehicle for *receiving* information:

Parents	Principals	Superintendent	Board
Students	Teachers	Other	
Other patrons	Staff	administrators	

The "lower bracket." which flows in reverse, is the board's vehicle for *directing* each group of players to properly dispense the educational product:

Board	Superintendent	Principals	Parents
	Other	Teachers	Students
	administrators	Staff	Other patrons

(*Note: You may wish to refer to page 10 to see how the process works as a complete loop).*

It is important, of course, for board members to recognize that while each group of participants has distinct responsibilities, the school board ultimately has key responsibilities which must be recognized in terms of how they relate to the various steps of this "manufacturing" process:

- *Planning, goal-setting, and appraisal.* These functions, performed in the "upper bracket" of the "manufacturing" process cannot be delegated by the board. The board is singularly responsible for developing long-range educational plans and policies for its school district. It also is responsible for seeking from the public, the schools, and the administration reliable input and factual information on which to base its decisions. Ultimately, the board is responsible for appraising the effectiveness of the district's goals through monitoring of administrative evaluations of other personnel, district programs, and student achievement.
- *Financial planning.* The board is responsible for the approval and adoption of the annual school budget. In doing so, the board must rely heavily on consultation with the superintendent. The superintendent is responsible for assessing and monitoring financial needs of the district and for providing documentation and recommendations on which the board can base its decisions. Other administrators and teachers have responsibility for generating input and documentation sought by the board in its initial assessments, as well as for providing the superintendent with reliable information concerning the short and long-range resource needs of the district.

  In most states, boards also have responsibility for authorizing expenditures of funds by the administration; making decisions relative to the issuance of capital improvement bonds; developing and adopting policies for the procurement, distribution, and disposal of equipment, property, and supplies; approving and selecting insurance programs for the district; and authorizing the administration to borrow funds within the limits of state laws—all of which can have a bearing on excellence.

- *Staffing and appraisal.* The board is responsible for developing policies that state the standards and expectations for the proficiency of all staff members. The board also is responsible for establishing policies governing salaries, terms and conditions of employment, fringe benefits, leave, inservice and other training, and state and federally mandated benefits. Also, in districts that collectively bargain, the board must designate a board negotiating team and ratify labor agreements.

  The administration is responsible, through delegation from the board, for the recruitment, hiring with board approval, evaluation, promotion, and discipline of employees. It also is responsible for regular and systematic production of the data and reports which enable the board to evaluate the district's education program and determine its adherence to goals. The administration is also responsible for reporting all findings to the board, teachers, and the public.

- *Instruction.* Working closely with the school administration, the board must establish goals and policies to guide the district's instructional program. The board is responsible for assuring that the district's curriculum meets state laws, as well as regulations promulgated by the state board of education. The board also is responsible for assuring administrative compliance with any curriculum-related court rulings. The administration is responsible for consulting with teachers, parents, and others to assure that the district's curriculum meets local expectations for excellence. It also is responsible for recommending to the board the scope of educational offerings and the types of textbooks and other materials that will best meet the district's educational goals. Teachers have the responsibility for assuring that the district goals and administrative procedures are interpreted properly. Students have the responsibility to participate fully in learning activities.

- *Length of school year.* In consultation with the administration (and in compliance with state laws or regulations), the board is responsible for setting the school calendar. It determines the number of days and the number of hours-per-day that schools will be open. The administration is responsible for operating and staffing the schools in accordance with board direction. Teachers and students are responsible for good attendance.

- *School facilities.* The board is responsible for determining the number and expected condition of school buildings, and for approving building plans. It also is responsible for setting policies that affect the educational environment in school facilities. The administration is responsible for consultation with the board and for securing the various designers, contractors, and maintenance people for facilities. It also is responsible for assuring that goals for facility environments are met. Teachers and students are responsible for maintaining a code of conduct that is conducive to learning.

- *Public involvement and public relations.* Since the primary goal of the board's assessment and policy-making efforts is to produce schools the public perceives and accepts as effective, the board should be responsible in its policies for directing the administration to seek public involvement in all aspects of school life. It also should direct the administration to provide for effective public relations by maintaining open, two-way communications with the public regarding

district goals, policies, and student achievement. Teachers are responsible for liaison with students, parents, and administrators; and students must maintain communication with their parents, teachers, counselors, and school officials.

- *Evaluation, policy refinement, and amendment.* The board is responsible for continuous monitoring and assessment of its goals and policies and their impact on district effectiveness. It should provide for periodic review and formal evaluation of the district's educational programs through the same process of fully involving the public, the administration, teachers, and students in gauging whether refinements or amendments are necessary. The administration has the responsibility to keep the board informed on new developments in effectiveness research and new approaches to educational excellence. Teachers, students, and all school publics have the responsibility for actively participating in and supporting these continuing assessment processes.

Why An Interactive Process?

It should be obvious that the complexity of assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of various aspects of the district's educational program requires some sort of orderly process. Board members even may wish to experiment with process models different from the one offered in this publication.

Regardless of which process the board selects, it is important that any effort to assess and affix responsibility for quality in education be based in an *interactive* process allowing dialogue *and, when necessary, negotiation)* among the public, the school staff, the administration, and the board. Anything less is unlikely to build the broadly based coalition required to make the translation of the board's educational goals into programs that become a universal, local contract between the public, the schools, educators, administrators, and the board members who serve public education. The board member should assess how interaction works in the "real world" of the school district.

Ideally, school business would flow in a circle which starts with the public's selection of the board as its educational policy-maker, in which the board sets policies for the administration to implement and in which the implementation by the professional staff returns education back to the public. Such a "closed loop" would suggest that a clear chain of command not only exists, but is actually observed.

In reality of course, a disgruntled parent may start with the teacher or principal, but will carry his or her complaint to the superintendent or to the board member if necessary. Similarly, teachers may have formal grievance procedures to follow, but will nevertheless go outside of the normal loop to directly impact the board if they do not feel they are getting satisfaction from the normal channels of authority.

So, although the "ideal" is a system in which the public elects the board (or its appointing officials), attends meetings and lets the board direct the administration, the administration directs the staff, and the staff directs the students, the "reality" is that all of these parties are interactive.

On the basis of that reality, it simply makes sense that the board use a process which channels this interaction into its planning process. (The old adage that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.")

VIII
Beyond the School District: an Arena of Broader Interaction

"Our final word, perhaps better characterized as a plea, is that all segments of our population give attention to the implementation of our recommendations. Our present plight did not appear overnight, and the responsibility for our current situation is widespread. Reform of our educational system will take time and unwavering commitment. It will require equally widespread, energetic, and dedicated action."

—National Commission on Excellence in Education

It would be ideal if local schools could, of and by themselves, solve all of the ills in the educational environment. Such an ideal opportunity, of course, does not exist; nor is it likely to emerge in this pluralistic and highly political democracy.

In its report to the nation, the Commission called upon scholarly, scientific, and learned societies to join in the national pursuit of excellence in education. The Commission added, "Help should come from students themselves; from parents, teachers, and school boards; from colleges and universities; from local, state, and federal officials; from teachers' and administrators' organizations; from industrial and labor councils; and from other groups with interest in and responsibility for educational reform."

The Commission specifically called on governors and school board members to show leadership in incorporating reforms into their educational policies and financial planning activities.

A Role for the Federal Government

The Commission also pointed out what it thought the role of the federal government should be in ensuring excellence in education. Specifically, that role should be to:

- Cooperate with states and localities to meet the needs of key groups of students such as the gifted and talented, the socioeconomically disadvantaged, minority and language minority students, and the handicapped.

- Provide functions of national significance that states and localities alone are unlikely to meet, such as protecting constitutional and civil rights for students and school personnel; collecting data, statistics, and information about education; supporting curriculum improvement and research on teaching, learning, and the management of schools; supporting teacher training in areas of critical shortage or key national needs; and providing student financial assistance, research, and graduate training.

The Commission emphasized that "The federal government has *the primary responsibility* to identify the national interest in education. It also should help fund and support efforts to protect and promote that interest. It must provide the national leadership to ensure that the nation's public and private resources are marshaled to address the issues in this report."

Most importantly, the Commission suggested that the federal government should be expected to meet its responsibilities to education with "a minimum of administrative burden and intrusiveness."

One might ask, "Is this a realistic expectation?"

If history is the barometer, board members might wonder if the Commission's expectations about a limited and unintrusive federal role is possible. Consider these:

- "The study indicates the quality of learning in our classrooms has been declining for the last two decades. . . . Those were years when the federal presence in education grew and grew. Parental control over local schools shrank. Bureaucracy ballooned until accountability seemed lost. . . . For too many years, people here in Washington acted like your families' wishes were only getting in the way."
  —President Reagan, radio address, April 30, 1983

- "There is no way to set educational policy in a political vacuum. But the pressures of local politics, close to parents of children in school, are far preferable to those of national politics where organized groups more easily lose sight of the interests of the teachers in teaching and of children in learning. The proliferation of narrow programs, however well-intentioned, each with its own legislative authorization or separate funding, had gone too far. Metric education, homemakers courses, ethnic studies, environmental courses, and various literacy and library programs, for example, symbolized the ability of each group to get from a pliant Congress what they were unable to get from a state legislature or local school board."
  —Joseph A. Califano, Jr., former secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, in Governing America, published in 1981 by Simon & Schuster

The views of both of these political men indicate the fundamental truth that federal funding results in federal programs. For example, President Johnson's start-up of funding for elementary and secondary school education—despite veto intervention by subsequent Presidents Nixon and Ford—grew from $538 million to $5 billion in a dozen years. The federal funding was followed closely by federal monitoring, regulation, and intervention through both the regulatory agencies and the federal courts.

Not all of this intervention, of course, was negative. It allowed the agenda for the social reforms of the 1960s and 1970s to be focused in the schools—a virtual necessity that met with a degree of public support in a period when divorce rates and the inflationary pressures leading to two-career families reportedly were impacting America's ability to teach values and social responsibilities at home.

Today, though, Americans are calling for a new educational agenda which recognizes that the ability to learn and master the *specialized skills* required to function in a world increasingly dominated by the "bells and whistles" of technology are absolutely dependent upon the mastery of *basic skills* such as reading, writing, oral expression, math, and physical and social sciences, as well as mastery over high-order skills such as thinking, reasoning, and synthesizing. The most recent polls on education indicate clearly that the agenda issues of the 1980s are fundamental: better discipline, better curriculum, better scholastic standards, and better teaching.

What Can Board Members Do?

At issue today is whether local school board members can provide the leadership to muster public support to answer the Commission's call for excellence, and do so outside of the arena of federal intervention.

If substantial support for educational reform does not come from the local level, history shows us that the likely result will be the surfacing of federal efforts to respond to the political mood of the country. Such was the case when President Carter—a former school board member concerned about students' ability to master basic learning skills—considered establishing a federal testing program to measure elementary and secondary student achievement.

It is imperative, then, that board members, should approach the "new beginning" called for by the Commission with confidence that they can change both the direction of education *and* the federal role in education.

Making the "right contacts." The key to achieving both of these objectives is simply pulling the proper levers.

If the board member starts with the presumption that education is (among other things) a product of politics, then educational reform, as a political process, must begin at the political subdivision closest to the people. This is a matter of fundamental rule: Politics, after all, begin at home.

Once the board has used the "manufacturing" or another process approach to gaining a commitment to excellence from parents, nonparent patrons, business and community organizations, students, teachers, and administrators, it is in an excellent position to use this coalition to demonstrate the "political clout" behind any issue and the political expediency of supporting education.

Here, then, are some "proper levers" to pull in eliminating external barriers to educational reform:

- *Local officials.* Board members must be aware of the other political bodies that often compete with the schools for funds from the taxpayer's pocket. Board support for nonschool programs (such as

county or city bond issues) can help to build bridges. Building bridges also can help boost school effectiveness, as well as the effectiveness of various nonschool agencies. By working with social agencies, for example, the schools can identify and correct problems, such as poverty-related absenteeism, student pregnancy, and student alcohol and drug abuse. And whenever the board can show other elected officials how s[illegible]ooling can cut expenditures in other areas (for example, increased vocational education reducing unemployment in the community), support for a school program is likely to come more quickly.

- *Business and labor.* A board member may not think of business and labor as political bodies, but their influence on the community cannot be understated. (Many board members, in fact, are members of or supported by these two influential coalitions.)

Both business and labor are aware of the economic and social implications of education and, as entities with vested interests in seeing education serve their needs, they are ready allies for the board. On board policy issues likely to enhance the local school climate, the board should be able to expect to see solid support arise from even the most hostile teachers' union. Working together to solve school problems has the added benefit of helping to alleviate the tensions that naturally arise out of the adversarial relationships between management and labor. This, in fact, is a selling point boards can make outside of the schools to get labor and management ot work together on educational issues.

- *Other school boards.* Competition among neighboring school districts is another natural reality. Often healthy, it has the potential of being a barrier to school improvement. (For example, two boards take competing positions on a piece of state legislation.) Board members should seek out other board members through their association's conventions, and other avenues to discuss various approaches to improving school performance. Boards will find here that superintendents—who have their own network—can be useful in establishing productive contacts between districts and fostering good interboard relations.
- *State school boards associations.* These organizations comprise the primary organized representation of the interest of local school boards at the state level. They provide a variety of programs and services for the local school boards in the given state government. This contact takes the form of "informational" lobbying with each branch of state government. Through its ongoing relationship with the NSBA Federal Relations Network, the state school boards association assists in contacts with national political leaders, marshals local support and helps to broaden substantially the base of support required to enhance local school board interests at the national level.
- *State officials.* Of all constituencies external to the district, state officials are perhaps the most vital to supporting education. With the exception of the local school board, there is no elective office in politics more dependent upon a firm commitment to education than the governorship or a seat in the state legislature.

Board members should involve key community groups in efforts to lobby state officials for support of education, and should testify (or have administrators testify) whenever legislation affecting education is under consideration.

- *The National School Boards Association.* NSBA is a full-service association for state school boards associations and local school boards. It also maintains a Federal Relations Network (FRN) through which locally elected and appointed school board members join together to lobby for the interests of public education and their local constituents. Many FRN members are involved in lobbying committees under the umbrella of their state association. State associations appoint FRN members.
- *Other state and national associations.* Every industry, including education, has professional associations, and most are involved in either informational or direct lobbying of state and national officials. Board members should find a natural "lobbying" connection with teacher associations, administrator organizations, college and university groups, learning societies, and so on. They also should not overlook "natural" connections with trade associations for business and professional areas dependent on pools of quality graduates.
- *Federal officials.* Like state officials, federal leaders are sensitive to education. Board members should let these leaders know what is being done on the local level and bring all elements of support to bear on these leaders—starting with local, then state, then national groups—to ensure that the federal role in education remains appropriately supportive, rather than directive.

IX
Conclusion: America Can Do It!

"Despite the obstacles and difficulties that inhibit the pursuit of superior educational attainment, we are confident, with history as our guide, that we can meet our goal."

—National Commission on Excellence in Education

From the colonial days when an angry band of Americans threw the tea into Boston harbor, to the day that President Kennedy pledged to place an American on the moon by the end of the 1960s, and beyond to more contemporary times in which Americans resolved to bring the energy crisis into check, there has been a common theme whenever our nation has focused its attention and its collective will upon issues. That is: "America can do it."

Whether the researchers have sat as the National Commission on Excellence in Education; as the National Science Board Commission on Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology; the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth; the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; or as other academic research bodies; the fundamental belief that excellence in education is a national priority requiring attention at every level of our society is central. All of these groups express a common conviction that the time for renewing our commitment to education has arrived.

As former U.S. Commissioner of Education and Carnegie Foundation President Ernest L. Boyer notes, "We believe that, today, America has the best opportunity it will have in this century to improve the schools. There is a growing national consensus that our future depends on public education. . . . There is an eagerness to move beyond the alarming headlines, to begin to rebuild, with confidence, the public schools. . . . If we do not seize this special moment, we will fail the coming generation and the nation."

Where Does the Board Member Fit Into the Picture?

While all of the research studies stress a prominent federal and state role, they also commonly recognize those roles as directive and supportive of local school board and community efforts. In the words of the Carnegie Report: that role is "to establish general standards and provide fiscal support, but not to meddle."

There can be no question, then, that the responsibility for local leadership rests with board members and all of the publics boards represent, including patrons, administrators, teachers, and students.

The underlying purpose of this guide is to give boards an appropriate sampling of the prevailing "foods for thought" on quality in education and a few key tips for beginning a process that leads the entire community towards a commitment to excellence. The end product of this leadership should be schools that the public perceives as excellent, that the public will support financially, to which the public will send its children and, above all else, in which students will achieve because they enjoy the challenge of learning and the opportunity to prepare themselves for their future roles in society and the world at large.

The board member's leadership role in this process is, essentially, as fundamental as the process of public education itself. As researcher John I. Goodlad notes, "Those of us involved in 'A Study of Schooling'... have been committed to one very basic working assumption: Improving schools requires knowing what is happening in and around them."

Perhaps, then, the appropriate conclusion to this guide is a final, personal assessment of where board members fit into the picture of education. What follows is a set of questions, drawn from the NSBA book, *Becoming a Better Board Member*. These questions, if answered personally by the board member and then shared with colleagues, administrators, parents, teachers, and students—and if reviewed periodically—should provide an appropriate focus of a board member's roles and responsibilities, all of which have an effect on the quality of education that's provided.

By using these questions as a self-assessment tool, the board member should be able to quickly determine how much he or she knows about the school district and, in the interest of assessing how excellent local schools are, in which areas you need to seek more information:

1. Where will the money come from to make the necessary changes as outlined in the various national reports?
2. What does your board do for your school district? What should your board do that it does not do now?
3. What changes has your district undergone in the past 5 years? 10 years? 20 years? What changes are anticipated in the next 2 years? 5 years? 10 years? What plans are being made to manage these changes?
4. What are your district's major objectives this year? Next year?
5. How does your board go about setting goals and objectives for the district? What planning procedures does it follow?
6. If your district could accomplish one major objective next year, what would you want it to be? If the board agrees with you, does it have a plan that would accomplish it? If not, who can help you devise and implement such a plan?
7. In the last year, what policies has your board adopted? Why were these adopted?
8. In the last year, has your board rejected a proposed policy? If so, what was the issue? Why was it rejected?
9. When was the last time your board reviewed its policies?
10. In your judgement, should your board give more or less attention

to policy-making than it does? Why?

11. How does your board know whether its policies are implemented in the schools?
12. What are the ground rules in your district for determining what is "board business" and what is "staff" work?
13. Is your district managed by an administrative team? If so, who is on it? Who controls it? How does it function? How does your board interact with it?
14. What skills and knowledge do you bring to the efforts of your board? What can you do to overcome any deficiencies in skill or lack of knowledge that you may have? Does your district provide for the orientation and development of board members?
15. Has your board taken full advantage of the materials and programs available from your state school boards association? From the National School Boards Association?
16. How does your board evaluate administrative efforts?
17. How are school programs evaluated?
18. How is legal advice provided to your district? How does your district use this advice?
19. How is the agenda for each board meeting set?
20. Does your board comply with applicable "Sunshine" laws when it addresses matters in its executive sessions? Can the types of concerns discussed legally take place behind closed doors?
21. Can you identify the major state laws that affect the work of your board?
22. Can you list several federal mandates that affect board decisions?
23. How does your board collectively participate in state and national legislative deliberations? What is the relationship of your board to your state school boards association's legislative activities?
24. How does your board participate in budget preparation?
25. Have the district's recent bond issues been successful? Why? Why not?
26. What major budget cuts have been made within the last two years? Why?
27. How does your board participate in setting the salaries of teachers and other school employees?
28. What staff development opportunities are provided to school employees?
29. How does your board influence the school curriculum?
30. What can you do personally to help ensure good working relationships between yourself and other members of your board? The superintendent? Other staff members?
31. Does your board use standing or ad hoc committees? If so, what are their responsibilities? What impact do committee recommendations have on board decisions?
32. In what ways does your board communicate with the public? School employees? The press?
33. Does your district have citizen advisory committees? What do they do?

34. How does your board respond to complaints from citizens? What should you do when a citizen complains to you about a school-related matter?
35. If your district engages in collective bargaining, what role does your board play?

A Few Final Words

The foregoing list of questions is much more than a "laundry list" of practical thinking for local school board members. The questions emphasize the importance of local leadership in the quest for excellent schools and excellence in the education these schools impart.

Although there can be no question that federal and state governments will maintain a continuing focus on education (and a responsibility for helping to fund education), neither of these legislative/administrative collectives is likely to obtain the levels of impact and leadership held by local school boards.

The Commission broadly defined excellence "to mean several related things. At the level of the *individual learner,* it means performing on the boundary of individual ability in ways that test and push back personal limits in the school and in the workplace. Excellence characterizes a *school or college* that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries in every way possible to help students reach them. Excellence characterizes a *society* that has adopted these policies, for it will then be prepared through the education and skill of its people to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world."

This view, and those of numerous other studies on the quality of education, generally recognizes that strides in communications and other technologies have "reduced the size" of the world. This, in turn, demands that education be recognized as more global in scope, as a continuing process, and as transcending the traditional ivy-covered walls of our educational plant.

This societal view of education, of course, is not new. More than a century ago Thomas Huxley suggested, "Education is the instruction of the intellect in the laws of nature, under which name I include not merely things and their forces, but (humans) and their ways."

The awesome contradiction in this view of education is that the local school board member must confront education at home. If a long-term and arduous assessment of excellence in education is to be successful, it must recognize that local school boards must first identify what kinds of schools and educational processes and what kinds of human resources are required to produce education which is perceived to be excellent by the public and, most important, which challenges students to learn and to continue educating themselves long after their school days have ended. Once this effort has been completed, it can then be effectively augmented at the broader levels of the state and federal governments.

It is the presumption of this guide that providing board members with an assessment process which is as basic and universal as our people's historic right to a quality education will, in the long run, help local school board members mobilize the resources available to our society and to meet the many calls for a "new beginning" in revitalizing the nation's historic commitment to excellence in education.

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Notes

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